The lived experience of discovery of purpose in student affairs among emerging professionals

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THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF DISCOVERY OF PURPOSE IN STUDENT AFFAIRS AMONG EMERGING PROFESSIONALS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

In

The Department of Educational Theory, Policy, and Practice

by

Nicholas Clegorne
B.M., University of Florida, 2002
M.M., University of Florida, 2004
August 2012
DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to:

Rebecca and Logan, without whom I would never have found the courage and persistence to complete the journey. Your patience with the long nights and missed bedtime stories contributed to this accomplishment more than you realize. I love you both with all my heart.

My parents; two educators whose commitment to students as history teachers has inspired and guided me towards scholarship.

My brother; a college student at the time of this writing who humbles me with his heart and accomplishments.

Dr. Roland Mitchell, whose guidance and support helped me to find balance and passion for the field once again.

And to all the student affairs practitioners who have shown me what is truly important in higher education administration and life in general.
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ABSTRACT

Some researchers estimate that as many as three out of five new professionals will leave the field of student affairs within the first five years. Furthermore low job satisfaction has been cited heavily among new professionals in student affairs. The alarming recognition that so many young professionals are unhappy and that more than half of the field’s new professionals will leave very early in their careers has prompted a number of examinations regarding the education, training, induction and supervision of new professionals in the field of student affairs. However, such examinations focus primarily on environmental influences external to the new professional.

Studies in similar fields have suggested low job satisfaction and high attrition rates are connected to a lack of articulated purpose in a given field. This study sought to examine the discovery of purpose as one possible intrinsic contributor to job satisfaction and retention among new professionals. A qualitative study was conducted to illuminate the stories of eight emerging professionals (first-year graduate students in higher education administration through third-year new professionals in student affairs). The research design utilized phenomenological and narrative lenses and engaged self-authorship and transition theory as theoretical frames in order to explore the lived experience of discovery of purpose among young student affairs practitioners.

Significant statements suggest that participant journeys were marked by repeated transition. Furthermore, data suggests that the ability to identify a resolute, self-authored, and impactful purpose highly coincided with a commitment to remain in the field. Additionally, emerging professionals who were self-motivated to join the field said they were more likely to remain in the field. In an effort to increase persistence in the field of student affairs, a number of
suggestions have been made with the intent to improve graduate preparation programs, induction processes, training designs, and supervision strategies.
CHAPTER I - INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Context of the Study

In this study I engage the lived experience of discovering purpose in academic and professional practices within the field of student affairs; specifically the experience of emerging student affairs professionals. I define an emerging student affairs professional as an individual who is in a master’s degree program in higher education, college student personnel, or a related field or within the first three years of professional work. At its core, the field of student affairs is a profession which maintains two expressed purposes. Nuss (1996) explains the first of these purposes as “the profession’s consistent and persistent emphasis on and commitment to the development of the whole person” (p. 23). Nuss continues with the second purpose saying “student affairs was originally designed to support the academic mission of the university” (p.23). The premise that defines the need for student affairs, then and now, is that academic curriculum and facilities are not enough to support academic goals and educate the whole person (Nuss, 1996).

A Brief History of Student Affairs. Meeting holistic student needs was often accomplished through residential colleges in the early colonial colleges and their liberal arts descendants before the mid 1800’s. Early residential colleges were environments where faculty and students lived, ate, studied, and played together (Lucas, 2006; Thelin, 2010, 2011). In modern post-industrial universities, faculty detachment (a result of the sheer size, expectations, and organizational structures of many institutions) demanded the installation of non-academic college student personnel to take over roles outside of the classroom to allow faculty time to complete research, teaching and service requirements (Lucas, 2006; Nuss, 1996; Thelin, 2010,
These non-academic professionals are individuals that have come to serve in roles such as advocacy and accountability, which helps students navigate university policies and codes of conduct; residential life, which provides living learning communities akin to the early residential colleges; campus life, which engages students’ social needs; wellness, which looks after student physiological and psychological wellbeing; and other offices geared towards meeting the myriad of student needs (Kezar, Chambers, & Burkhardt, 2005; Schuh, Jones, & Harper, 2010).

Nuss (1996) suggests that the roots of student affairs programs can be found in the English universities of Oxford and Cambridge. From the 1600s into the 1800s, colonial colleges adopted such systems wherein faculty lived with students in authoritarian roles viewing the students as “immature adolescents” (Nuss, 1996, p. 24). Between the 1850s and early 1900s several events impacted the development of student affairs, including industrialization, the nation building movement, the land grant acts, the entry of women into the academy, and changing faculty and upper administrative roles. During the time period after industrialization, a number of dean positions were developed to help manage student life and conduct. Progression of such student affairs positions continued throughout the first half of the twentieth century as student affairs became its own profession. Finally, the latter half of the twentieth century was a time of growth and expansion for the field of student affairs wherein greater efforts to research contemporary students and diversify roles created a deep and broad system of professionals.

Roles within student affairs offices often combine multiple responsibilities in that professionals are accountable for managing budget and finance, programming, strategic planning, and even 24 hour crisis response (Blimling & Whitt, 1999; Schuh et al., 2010). Furthermore, contemporary student affairs practitioners have a commitment to creating, shaping, implementing and/or assessing the co-curriculum; a term given to a set of learning experiences
fostered by non-academic units to support the university mission and holistic development of students (Keeling, 2004, 2006; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005). This broad description of the field serves to situate the environments and roles in which emerging student affairs professionals are expected to perform. The rationale for the study stems from observations of emerging professionals and seeks to illuminate understanding of the manners by which they make meaning within these structures.

A Concern: Emerging Professional Satisfaction and Attrition. Some estimates suggest that attrition among emerging student affairs professionals is as high as 60% within the first five years (Renn & Hodges, 2007; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008). The attrition problem is approached by a number of authors and researchers (Burkard, Cole, Ott, & Stoflet, 2004; Herdlein, 2004; Tull, 2006). Of related and potentially greater threat to the field is low job satisfaction among new professionals. In order to address these concerns a number of studies, articles, and books have been published. Some authors focus on the preparation offered in the master’s degree (e.g. Herdlein, 2004; Renn & Hodges, 2007; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008). Other writers approach the issue from the side of the employer, suggesting that divisions and departments should take care to appropriately induct, train, mentor and/or supervise new professionals (e.g. S. A. Saunders, Cooper, Winston, & Chernow, 2000; Tull, 2006; Tull, Hirt, & Saunders, 2009). Other entries into the literature speak directly to emerging professionals and read like handbooks for managing institutional culture and choosing the right fit for career placement (e.g. Amey & Ressor, 1998). The current literature addresses approaches to combating new professional attrition and poor motivation that are external to the emerging professional rather than the intrinsic motivations of the individual. These topics will be discussed in greater detail in chapter two.
A Comparison: Purpose in K-12 Educators. The previous section touched on strategies for improving emerging professional satisfaction and retention that were external to the new professional. Much work has been done researching and writing about such external contributions to new professional development. While forces and systems external to the new professional are important, the intrinsic motivations and purpose of the individual must also be explored. It is true that external strategies such as mentoring or supervising can indirectly address intrinsic motivations of new professionals, but in such strategies the source of the treatment remains apart from the individual. Intrinsic motivations as related to goals and expectations within the field, which I will generally refer to as purpose, have not been the primary focus of any recent studies looking specifically at emerging student affairs professionals, but some authors have examined similar traits in beginning K-12 teachers.

The comparison of emerging student affairs professionals to beginning teachers is imperfect because the two professions are not exactly the same in scope and mission. For instance, teachers generally do not expect some form of upward mobility, whereas student affairs professionals do. Differences like hierarchy and structure are important, but there are lessons to be learned from studies regarding purpose among beginning teachers.

Beginning teachers who were able to define a sense of professional purpose as educators that fit into the expectations of the profession were generally more content and are retained to the profession (Lasky, 2005). Such teachers demonstrated higher intent to remain in the field and higher job satisfaction, despite external influences, than those which could not align their own purpose to that of the field (Darby, 2008). A good example of this is the notion of upward mobility. Teachers who rooted notions of professional purpose and success in upward mobility tended to leave the field because there was little room for promotion (van den Berg, 2002).
such an example of upward mobility the teachers’ purpose and career aspirations are independent of the field.

Is it possible that a similar event - wherein unhappiness in one’s career is connected to lack of interdependent purpose - is occurring within the ranks of emerging student affairs practitioners? For instance if a primary aspect of emerging professional purpose is rooted in connection with the students, job dissatisfaction might increase as promotions that are increasingly administrative remove the individual from contact with students. A step towards the answer to this question of purpose’s connection to emerging professional satisfaction and retention may come from a greater understanding of the lived experience surrounding discovery of purpose within student affairs among emerging professionals. Inquiry into this discovery of purpose will likely be helpful in exploring intrinsic motivations of emerging professionals.

Methodological Lens

In order to illuminate the lived experience of emerging professionals regarding discovery of professional purpose, qualitative methods are appropriate because they are best for exploring and understanding experience (Creswell, 2002, 2009). Qualitative methods are more suited to this inquiry because they allow participant stories to emerge without excessive interpretation or analysis and allow for a more authentic exposure of participant experiences (Creswell, 2009). I propose that interviewing emerging professionals and encouraging them to tell their own stories will help make those experiences more explicit. Methodologies that encourage storytelling and an analysis of lived experience most frequently connect to phenomenological methods (Creswell, 2009; Lichtman, 2006). In this case the event is an emerging professional’s experience of discovering purpose. The guiding research question for
this qualitative exploration is “what is the lived experience of discovery of purpose in student affairs among emerging professionals?”

**Theoretical Lens: Notions of Purpose**

Before beginning, it is important to operationalize notions of “purpose.” Before beginning the study my a priori definition of purpose was simply “something set up as an object or end to be attained” (“Purpose,” n.d.). This definition was expanded and eventually focused during the study to “a self-authored, determined and resolute focus within student affairs that is action oriented, intentional, and impactful”. When approaching this notion for K-12 teachers, some researchers have found identity and self-understanding within a field to be excellent descriptors of purpose (Kelchterman, 2005; Lasky, 2005; Schmidt & Datnow, 2005; van Veen, Sleegers, & Van de Ven, 2005; Zembylas, 2005). While identity is important, the more useful term for this study is self-understanding as it suggests a point of view which is fluid and able to grow in contrast to an identity that is fixed at any given point (Darby, 2008).

Furthermore, because purpose is a meaning-making structure that is informed by both external stimuli, such as the profession, peer group, or academy in general, and internal stimuli, the idea of self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2001; Hodge, Baxter Magolda, & Haynes, 2009; Khine, 2008) is also important. The concept of self-authorship pertains to the manners by which individuals create and negotiate meaning-making structures in order to interdependently engage their environments (Baxter Magolda, 2001; Hodge et al., 2009). Specifically, instances of shifts in meaning-making are often associated with obstacles or changes in one’s life experience (Hodge et al., 2009; Piaget, 1950).

Piaget (1950) suggested that incidents occur which alter the way one negotiates interdependent interactions with the community. He went on to say that individuals are
constantly defining and redefining “rules” which dictate interactions. When an incident occurs that challenges a rule, the old rule is altered or rejected entirely in favor of a new rule to allow for coping with the incident (Hodge et al., 2009). This concept is integral to self-authorship; however, in order to understand the experiences one needs to operationalize and explore the instances which catalyze these rule changes. Schlossberg et al. (1995) acknowledge the coping strategies described by Piaget as being related to one of four sets of factors; situation, self, support, and strategies. They suggest that any of these factors may be altered during a transition. A transition is defined as “any event or non-event that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, or roles” (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998).

I am operationalizing purpose as being related an individual’s self-understanding of his or her objective within student affairs. In order to help recognize transition periods within the stories of emerging professionals and further understand the resulting meaning-making adaptations several theoretical lenses will be used. First, I will utilize transition theory (Evans et al., 1998; Schlossberg et al., 1995) to help acknowledge important events and/or non-events. Next, the concept of self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2001; Hodge et al., 2009) will be used to address the meaning-making structures described in participant interviews.

**Rationale for the Study**

The inspiration to engage notions of purpose in emerging professionals is rooted in my own experiences as a new professional, and now, as a manager in charge of emerging professionals in a student affairs division. A representative vignette is presented below to illustrate some notions of purpose I have observed within emerging professionals at my own research focused land-grant institution. This localized anecdote is not meant to suggest that the interactions described in the vignette are true among all emerging student affairs professionals.
On the other hand, it serves to explicitly underscore the observed disconnect between emerging professional-defined purpose and the profession that inspired this study.

**Vignette: A Tale of Three Candidates**

As I enter the room, I am greeted by an oddly familiar musty mold smell reminiscent of older lecture halls and libraries found throughout the Deep South. Within this lecture hall sits the rank and file of student affairs professionals, graduate assistants, and interns that form the corpus of the student services division at my university. This body consists of representatives of all the major areas. Members of the office of campus life sit next to those from the office of the Dean of Students, flanked by residential life and wellness services, and a sprinkling of representatives from university recreation decked out in their Nike® branded school athletic garb. Among this congress are students and practitioners of varying levels of professional experience ranging from fledgling graduate students to seasoned veterans poised for retirement and every level in between. I find a seat within my own workplace caste – residential life – and glance to my left at a group of bright-eyed graduate students and first year professionals just as the main stage entrance swings open. I see the young professionals at whom I am staring come to attention like a high school marching band and I turn to ascertain the cause. A middle aged man, likely in his 50s, walks to the podium. The graduates and new professionals wait with great anticipation.

This was the show we were here to see; a group convocation for a senior student affairs officer search. As is par for the course in these proceedings the candidate is dressed very well, commands a presence with his body language and voice, and exudes confidence and graceful power as he takes the stage. This is the third candidate to visit campus and like the two before, he is prepared to deftly negotiate shifting politics, manage impossible budgetary situations and,
most importantly, let everyone in the room know that he is there to support them and their great university. Questions are asked from the floor and answers are given. I find myself smiling as the candidate rumbles through answers; he is blunt unlike the others. I get the feeling he truly believes everything he says and is not filtering or censoring for the purposes of the interview.

Near the end of the session the floor is opened for any and all questions and a hand in front rises. The hand belongs to one of the new professionals; a recent graduate from the institution’s higher education administration master’s program. “What advice would you give graduate students and new professionals for becoming *you* one day”. I smile because the question is familiar. In fact, the same question has been asked of the previous two candidates.

The previous candidates had provided clearly defined responses outlining bulleted lists of best practices and professional development opportunities in cleanly packaged, well-rehearsed responses. Weeks before, the first candidate had given the group “ten steps for moving up in student affairs”; citing general quips such as “find a mentor and cultivate a relationship with him/her” and “take every professional development opportunity available to increase experience and build a résumé”. The second had given “three rules for success in student affairs” among which advocacy, professionalism, and continued education were chief. Indeed, the answers of these first two outstanding candidates were well-thought-out, appropriate, and truthful responses in light of the question asked. Both candidates were outstanding professionals of integrity who remain key contributors to the field, but it was the response of the third candidate that elicited a response that inspired this study.

Focusing on the matter at hand, the third candidate chooses to answer in a bold way. Rather than pandering to the question with an easily remembered set of factoids, he replies with questions of his own “Do you even know what I do?” he says “Do you really know that you want
my job?”. The culmination of this candidate’s blunt response is a commentary regarding upward mobility in student affairs. Specifically he states that many practitioners rise to positions in which they are unhappy, despite their unpreparedness or lack of desire for the role, simply because they feel that upward mobility is the driving expectation. In short, the third candidate chose to complicate the question rather than solve the issue and put any concerns to rest.

In the days following the interview, I listen closely to various professionals at my university as they discuss the candidates’ responses. The morning after the interview I overhear my supervisor tell a mid-manager under his supervision that he thought that the final candidate “had guts”. Later that day, sitting around a table at a local grill with mid-managers like myself, I discover that my colleagues have mixed opinions. Many agree that the third candidate was more reasonable to approach a complicated issue such as upward mobility in student affairs with an unabashed and unapologetic exposition which sought not to simplify, but rather complicate a challenging concern. Others suggest that, regardless of the original purpose of student affairs and higher education, times have changed and forced student services professionals to become more business-like. This latter group of individuals suggests that rooting purpose in notions of upward mobility and increasing status within the organization are only natural.

The notion that upward mobility is a primary goal within student affairs careers is also shared, if not substantially magnified by a younger group - one made up of higher education masters students and recent graduates who work in practitioner roles as graduate assistants and entry-level professionals respectively. Here –and for the remainder of this study – I will generally refer to this admittedly ambiguous grouping as emerging student affairs professionals, or simply emerging professionals. Their comments cover a range of responses and none are overly positive. A graduate student passes me in the hall after the interview and, with a confused
look, asks me “Was that guy for real? Who on earth puts their career on hold on purpose”.

Chatting with several entry-level professionals the next day, they suggest that the third candidate was “alright, but wasn’t able to define things as clearly as the other two”. I observe more direct criticism a few days after the interview when I hear a voice among a group of emerging professionals gathered in a residence hall lobby conclude that “I hope it’s not that last guy that gets hired; he can’t do anything for my career”. It seems that these individual emerging professionals, typically in entry-level roles, tend to identify strongly against the opinions voiced by the third candidate. Some seem disturbed by the ambiguity of the conversation with the candidate. Further, they appear to specifically dismiss the notion that individuals should not seek to rise as high as possible in higher education administration as a default. In one conversation, two emerging professionals suggested that the ideal career is one that “ends with a Vice President role or something similar; nothing less is acceptable”. Furthermore one of these individuals regarded one who seeks anything less than the role of a senior student affairs officer as “lazy, lacking confidence, and ill-equipped as a professional”.

**A Point for Departure**

The vignette tells the story of emerging student affairs professionals perceiving success as a product of completing tasks, biding time, and working hard, rather than actively engaging with a complex community of students, staff, faculty and administrators to negotiate curriculum and experiences that will shape our world. In this narrative, notions of purpose seem to be linked to improving one’s status and/or wealth wherein personal intrinsic purpose seems detached from a more pragmatic conceptualization of professional purpose.

Additionally, and of equal import, is the preference of the individuals in the vignette towards a world view regarding education as a collection of skillsets rather than modes of
understanding. This draw towards simple, straightforward meaning-making in student affairs within higher education is contrary to the expressed notions of self-authorship with regard to discovering and living one’s purpose. Many of the opinions expressed in the vignette are contrary to self-authored expression because the related meaning-making structures in the vignette seek to *decrease* complexity and rely on external motivations whereas self-authored meaning making structures seek to *increase* complexity as personal beliefs are merged with external sources (Baxter Magolda, 2001; Hodge et al., 2009). A similar phenomenon has been noted in K-12 educators (Darby, 2008). In K-12 examples, simple forms of understanding align closely with external motivations shown to increase job dissatisfaction and attrition among K-12 teachers (Kelchtermann, 2005; Schmidt & Datnow, 2005; van Veen et al., 2005; Zembylas, 2005).

**Summary of the Study’s Purpose**

This study is primarily intended to report the lived experiences of emerging student affairs professionals as they self-author purpose in the field. The main concern that drives the study is the observation of emerging professional attrition and job dissatisfaction. This concern is viewed in comparison to studies of attrition and dissatisfaction in related fields that have shown intrinsic purpose to be highly connected to aspects of new professional identity and purpose (Kelchtermann, 2005; Lasky, 2005; Schmidt & Datnow, 2005; van Veen et al., 2005; Zembylas, 2005). Emerging professional stories will be told using open interviews. Self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2001; Hodge et al., 2009) and transition theory (Evans et al., 1998; Schlossberg et al., 1995) will be used as theoretical frames in order to acknowledge instances of discovering purpose and self-understanding. The stories and themes identified in this study can add to a better understanding of educating, inducting and supervising emerging professionals in higher education and student affairs.
CHAPTER II – LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The literature review below serves to both operationalize my conceptualization of purpose in student affairs as well as situate the participants of the study. First I will cite and capitulate previously mentioned concepts such as self-understanding, self-authorship, and transition theory. I will follow this with a summary of how these concepts are integrated into my own concept of purpose. Next, I will address societal, educational and vocational underpinnings of the cohort from which the participants for this study will be drawn. Finally, the afore mentioned concepts will be tied together to position a framework and rationale for the study.

Purpose

Early in the study I operationalized purpose in student affairs as “an individual’s self-understanding of his or her objective within student affairs”. Later the definition was focused to be “a self-authored, determined and resolute focus within student affairs that is action oriented, intentional, and impactful”. Such a concept encompasses one’s own self-awareness and the manners by which he or she navigates periods of transition and normalcy in his or her life. In order to engage components of the process of discovering purpose I will discuss notions of self-understanding, transition theory, and self-authorship. Self-understanding is a construct of identity which seeks not to indicate a completed and static state of mind, but rather a more fluid acknowledgement of positionality at any given moment (Darby, 2008; Kelchtermen, 2005). Transition theory is a constructivist model that allows practitioners and scholars to explore the manners by which individuals cope with transitions brought on by events and/or non-events (Schlossberg et al., 1995). Self-authorship is a psychosocial construct by which individuals
establish interdependence with their environments (Baxter Magolda, 2001). Many of these lenses have been applied to new professionals in fields external to student affairs, most notably teaching (Darby, 2008; Kelchtermann, 2005; Lasky, 2005; Schmidt & Datnow, 2005; van Veen et al., 2005; Zembylas, 2005). Observations from such fields prove fruitful for examination as well.

**Self-Understanding.** The ways which individuals understand themselves and form identity are central to how they engage with various communities (Evans et al., 1998). Kelchtermann (2005), when discussing such a concept among K-12 educators, suggests that the term identity is insufficient for driving towards the core purpose of beginning teachers and I submit that this observation is true for emerging student affairs professionals as well. Kelchtermann posits that there is finality to the term identity (Darby, 2008; Kelchtermann, 2005). It is unreasonable to assume any completion of identity in this exploration since the participants in this study are at the very beginning of their journey in student affairs. Instead, self-understanding is a better framework because it offers a more fluid paradigm for understanding the evolution of thought while discovering purpose. Kelchtermann (2005) and Darby (2008) employed this framework to examine beginning teachers’ self image, job motivation, future perspectives, self esteem, and day-to-day task perception within the K-12 system. I seek to acknowledge similar stories among emerging student affairs professionals in order to better understand participants’ discoveries of purpose.

**Transition Theory.** Transition theory is used to address the experiences of individuals as they encounter events or non-events that alter the manners by which the individual views the world. Transition theory is appropriate for this study because discovering purpose in student
affairs signifies a transition of identity within the emerging professional. When discussing the theory of transitions Schlossberg et al. (1995) note “that a transition exists only if it is so defined by the individual experiencing it” (Evans et al., 1998, p. 115). Such a reliance on the individual telling of lived experience further connects this theoretical frame to the methodological considerations of this study.

Schlossberg et al. (1995) describe three components with multiple subcomponents in their model. They highlight 1) Transitions, 2) The Transition Process, and 3) Coping with Transitions as major components of the theory. In the model described by Schlossberg et al., the term transition represents “an event or non-event that results in change in relationships, routines, assumptions, or roles” (Evans et al., 1998, p.115). The meaning of these transitions is said to be based on the transition type (anticipated, unanticipated, non-event), the context or relationship to the transition and setting, and impact or alterations in daily life (Schlossberg et al., 1995). The transition process includes reactions over time as individuals move in, through, and out of transitions. How an individual copes with such transitions as described by Schlossberg et al. (1995) is:

“Influenced by (a) ratio of assets and liabilities in regard to four sets of factors.
Situation: trigger, timing, control, role change, duration, previous experience, concurrent stress, assessment

Self: personal and demographic characteristics (socio economic status, gender, age, stage of life, health, ethnicity), psychological resources (ego, development, outlook, commitment, values)

Support: types (intimate, family, friends, institutional), functions (affect, affirmation, aid, honest feedback), measurement (role dependent, stable, and changing supports)

Strategies: categories (modify situation, control meaning, manage stress in aftermath), coping modes (information seeking, direct action, inhibition of action, intrapsychic behavior)” (p. 115)
The notions of transition put forth by Schlossberg et al. will be used as an aid when coding initial themes in the participant stories.

**Self-Authorship.** According to Hodge et al. (2009), “Self-authorship enables learners to evaluate information critically, form their own judgments, and collaborate with others to act wisely” (p. 18). The concept of self-authorship was developed by Marcia Baxter Magolda through a longitudinal study described here by Baxter Magolda (2001):

> “The annual interview began with a summary of the focus of the project, which was to continue to explore how participants learn and come to know. The participant was then asked to think about important learning experiences that took place since the previous interview. The participant volunteered those experiences, described them, and described their impact on her or his thinking.”. (p. 47)

Based on data collected from these interviews, self-authorship has been conceptualized in three dimensions including epistemological self-authorship, intrapersonal self-authorship, and interpersonal self-authorship; each with three steps of progress which include external formulas, crossroads, and self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2001).

Here, I will highlight Baxter Magolda’s dimensions of self-authorship. The epistemological dimension deals with how individuals analyze claims of others to generate their own ideas. The intrapersonal dimension has to do with the manners by which individuals assert their own voice to express disagreement with others. Finally, the interpersonal dimension is what allows an individual to overcome need for acceptance from others in order to author their own opinions (Baxter Magolda, 2001; Hodge et al., 2009).

Baxter Magolda describes three levels within each of the dimensions of self-authorship as well. First there are external formulas in which the individual’s opinions are largely shaped by forces external to the person. Next, there is the crossroads step where a person begins to see multiple points of view and begins to challenge the status quo. Lastly, the person begins to self-
author a world view which makes value judgments and takes a position based on a sophisticated analysis of multiple positions.

As Kerr (2001) and Birnbaum (1989) suggest, the contemporary university is a complex organization encompassing multiple world views. Student affairs practitioners, like those described in the vignette, may seek simple, straightforward expectations of purpose within the university setting, but such a paradigm seems unlikely. Constructing one’s own set of politics through self-authored means is connected to discovering purpose within the field of student affairs.

**Purpose in Related Fields.** Though no literature could be found which empirically examined discovery of purpose among emerging student affairs professionals, there are some connections to such a topic within K-12 educational settings. Some studies help illuminate typologies of purpose within education (e.g. Thompson, Turner, & Nietfeld, 2011), while others speak more directly to self-understanding among teachers (e.g. Darby, 2008). Still others connect such intrinsic motivations to persistence and job satisfaction (e.g. Bruinsma & Jansen, 2010).

Thompson et al. (2011) conducted a mixed methods study which sought to illuminate a typology of pre-service teachers. In the study, 215 undergraduate students participated in a survey and three distinct typologies identified. Each type of pre-service teacher was then more closely examined through narrative inquiry. In short, three clusters of participants which corresponded to the typology were identified. The first cluster was dubbed “Enthusiastic”. Altruism and intrinsic motivation were most important to this group among the many measured dimensions. The second cluster was named “Conventional”. This group shared strong connections to altruism and intrinsic motivation, but sought connection with their peers far less
vigorously than the “Enthusiastic” cluster. Lastly there was the “Pragmatic” cluster. This group demonstrated reduced interest in all areas and rated job benefits higher than other clusters. Intrinsic motivation was still important to the “Pragmatic” cluster, but far less so than the other groups. I submit the work of Thompson et al. (2011) as evidence that intrinsic motivations are an inherently large component of an educator’s purpose.

A number of studies have approached the manner by which intrinsic motivations and emotions contribute to professional self-understanding among teachers (Darby, 2008; Kelchterman, 2005; Lasky, 2005; Schmidt & Datnow, 2005; van Veen et al., 2005; Zembylas, 2005). Van Veen et al. (2005), for instance, looked at the ways that teachers’ emotions affected identity and educational change. The ways teachers experienced educational reform and altered their professional purpose accordingly was noted. Such an alteration of purpose was examined by Kelchterman (2005), who noted that self-understanding among teachers was central to their success during school reforms. Lasky (2005) examined how agency adds to the concepts discussed by van Veen and Kelchterman to shape the professional identities of teachers. Outside of these examples others have expressed similar findings (Schmidt & Datnow, 2005; van Veen et al., 2005; Zembylas, 2005). Such studies demonstrate the import of self-authored purpose in educational settings in order to make sense of and persevere through change while remaining positive and satisfied. These are notions which can be examined in emerging student affairs professionals. Based on these findings Darby (2008) conducted a study which examined the ways that teachers responded when circumstances forced an alteration of purpose. Through constructing new professional selves, the participants in Darby’s study found satisfaction and purpose in a new paradigm of educational expectations.
The ability to author a purpose that is consistent with the profession in which one chooses to operate seems highly connected to satisfaction and persistence in the profession. Coleman et al. (1999) suggest that this is true, indicating that those who root their own locus of control intrinsically are more committed and successful within their organizations. A study which brings these notions of intrinsic motivation and satisfaction together was conducted by Bruinsma & Jansen (2010). Bruinsma & Jansen found that intrinsic and altruistic motivations to become a teacher, through an overarching satisfaction with preparatory programs, directly corresponded with intent to remain in the profession. Such a direct connection between new teacher purpose and intent to remain in the field illustrates the import of examining purpose among emerging student affairs professionals.

**Environmental Contributions to Self-Understanding**

Three potential contributors to notions of purpose among emerging student affairs professionals are societal influences, educational effects, and vocational foundations. Societal influences are largely difficult to cover, but here I will use theories surrounding generational cohorts to describe societal trends among the participant pool. I will then highlight educational policy and trends that have impacted educational systems while participants were active in the schools. Finally, I will address how vocational expectations within student affairs might influence purpose in emerging student affairs professionals.

**Generational Identity.** Among the participant pool and selected participants, all individuals fall into the age range of 22 to 28 years of age. This places the birth years of these individuals between 1984 and 1989 at the time of this writing in 2011. Many authors suggest that a “generational cohort” is a measurable phenomenon associated with certain time spans in
U.S. History (Howe & Strauss, 1991, 2000, 2007; Mannheim, 1970; Twenge, 2006, 2009, 2010). Some like Howe and Strauss (1991, 2000, 2007) suggest that a predictable cycle is inherent to western and U.S. culture. They go on to suggest that the generation which is now participating in and beginning to exit graduate school fits firmly into such a cycle. Others such as Twenge (2006, 2009, 2010) remark that generational differences are less routine and suggest that decoding aspects of such cohorts are an application of social science as opposed to historic analysis and prophetic prediction. Still others suggest that individuals at certain benchmarks in their lifespan tend to have a similar scope of understanding of the world and its many complex relationships. In other words, the latter groups suggests that it is not the generations that change in their own right, but rather the interaction between students at the “quarter-life” mark (Arnett, 2000; Erikson, 1980; Robbins & Wilner, 2001; Ryder, 1965) and the world around them that creates a commonality of experience which can be observed as a “generational difference”.

Ideology surrounding not only the concept of generation cohorts, but specific generational traits is a topic that is debated (Hoover, 2009). As we will see, the specific literature that sets up the most popular conceptualization of the cohort – The Millennial Generation (Howe & Strauss, 1991, 2000, 2007) – has little empirical grounding. What this literature lacks in scientific underpinnings, it gains with popular success. Despite some scholars suggestions which claim that the existence of generational cohorts is suspect (Levine & Cureton, 1998), a number of articles accept the notions represented in generational theory as fact (Levit, 2009; Marston, 2005; McHaney, 2011; Miller & Norton, 2003; Murray, 1999). Furthermore, practitioners within the fields of education (Bonner, Marbley, & Howard-Hamilton, 2011; Gura & King, 2007), management (DelCampo, 2011; Egeler, 2003; Espinoza, Ukleja, & Rusch, 2010; Howe & Nadler, 2010; Marston, 2005; Orrell, 2007; Sujansky & Ferri-Reed, 2009), and
advertising (Rainer & Rainer, 2011; Strauss, 2005; Wells, 2011) have operationalized the claims of such literature in policies, practices and pedagogies.

A distinction between overarching explanations for, or predicted outcomes of, observed generational traits is less important than the recognition that such traits appear to exist. For example, regardless of whether one believes the tendencies for millennial students to work in groups is a strength, limitation, or simply fantasy made real by policies based on generational literature, the fact that this phenomenon has been observed by multiple researchers with differing agendas suggests that the tendency is likely to hold some material reality. Exemplars of such research will be reviewed below.

**Generational Cohorts.** The generational theory presented by Neil Howe and William Strauss is perhaps the most popular and mainstream approach to defining a generational cohort. The notion of a generational cohort was first described by sociologists Karl Mannheim in 1923 (Mannheim, 1970). Mannheim asserted that generations tended to develop identities based on having lived through similar historical events. Mannheim went on to suggest that the critical ages of 17-25 seemed most important when imprinting such notions. Ryder suggested that young people rallied around revolutionary moments and created group identities which are significant (Ryder, 1965). Discussions of “Baby Boomers” (Jones, 1980) and “Generation X” (Coupland, 1991) engaged the same idea, but Howe and Strauss (1991) operationalized the generational cohort concept for modern Americans. They maintained that by studying the history of the United States, one could produce a generational biography which described the default philosophy of the American people during a given timeframe. Furthermore, they suggested that these philosophies were limited in focus and moved in predictable patterns.
While Howe and Strauss suggest that each generation is unique in itself, they also submit that each generation falls within one of four archetypes which repeat predictably. The cycle they suggest is as follows: First comes the Prophet generation which Howe and Strauss describe as those who come after a time of crisis and tend to make great leaps in vision and values. The Nomad generation comes next and is said to be embodied by members who are under-protected as children, pragmatic as adults, and resilient in old-age. Following the nomads Howe and Strauss say that the Hero generation arrives with a sheltered childhood, perhaps overly-confident adulthood, and politically powerful old-age. The cycle is completed by an Artist generation which is categorized by a quieter, consensus building existence (Howe & Strauss, 1991).

The model suggested by Howe and Strauss is extremely complex and highlights multiple cycles including generations, socio-political crises, and societal awakenings. For the purposes of this study, it will suffice to say that there is some strong rationale with regards to explicit historical underpinnings within the inferences Howe and Strauss make regarding generational progression. They suggest that each generation responds to the one before by compensation for extremes. An example of this can be found in the childhoods of what Howe and Strauss call the 13th generation (Generation X) and the Millennial Generation. Howe and Strauss suggest the members of the former are often categorized by their self-reliance as latchkey children in an age where many came from broken families or both parents tended to work late. In contrast they claim the latter received immense nurturing by their parents wherein almost permanently dependent relationships were forged between parent and child. In short, one extreme – lack of nurture for the 13th generation – was replaced by an opposite wherein Millennial children were highly nurtured (Howe & Strauss, 2000).
While the grander implications of such generational theory are certainly interesting, this review will focus on the impact that they have on the contemporary emerging student affairs professional. Typically aged emerging professionals tend to belong to the generation commonly called the Millennial Generation. Millennial is the term coined by Howe and Strauss, but others have reified the term and philosophies propagated by their work (Bonner et al., 2011; DelCampo, 2011; Egeler, 2003; Espinoza et al., 2010). The timing of this suggested generational cohort is important because there is an unprecedented amount of literature connected with strategies for approaching this generation. Howe and Strauss, once again, emerge as seminal authors in this discussion although the topic of generational cohorts has become more fashionable as of late with many authors broaching topics surrounding “the Millennials” (Hoover, 2009). Primary sources of literature tend to be focused around designing and implementing education, management, and marketing strategies to best utilize or empower this group of individuals.

Howe and Strauss describe individuals belonging to the Millennial Generation as having seven core traits including: special, sheltered, confident, team-oriented, conventional, pressured, and achieving. According to *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation*, they were the first to dub the generation in question “Millennials” in 1987 (Howe & Strauss, 2000). They go on to say that before this time period few people recognized or labeled generational cohorting. By 1997, ABC world news was reporting that “The Millennial Generation” was the most common distinction for the given age bracket (Jennings, 1997). Culturally, it is difficult to say whether using such a frame altered the beliefs of the individuals within the generation, but Howe and Strauss (2000) do say that the Millennials were the first generation to actively identify themselves with a generational cohort early on.
Moving to the characteristics that Howe and Strauss suggest are indicative of the Millennial Generation, the authors explain that a number of mostly positive attributes accompany the generation (Howe & Strauss, 1991, 2000, 2007). Millennials are described as being born and raised in a time when Americans were more positive about children and, as a result, have an optimistic outlook on life. Howe and Strauss claim these students feel that growing up was easier for them than their parents. They go on to say Millennials are trusting team players who tend to follow rules and are not selfish. Further, Millennials are conceptualized as nurtured and smarter than people think. Lastly these individuals also are devoted to progress and growth.

Howe and Strauss suggest there may be negative consequences of such a generational cohort, but center these fears on the concept that other generational cohorts will reject the salvation this “next great generation offers”.

“Howlens do pose a threat to the future of this nation and the world. But if danger arrives, it won’t come from the direction today’s adults worry about – in the form of a selfish, alienated rabble of disaffected Ultra-Gen-X hyperslackers. Imagine, instead, an unstoppable mass hurtling down the track in the opposite direction, a cadre of young people so cohesive and so directional that, if their aspirations are thwarted, they might overwhelm the political defenses of their elders and mobilize around a risky, even destructive national agenda…now that older generations are starting to produce kids like this…can you handle them?” (Howe and Strauss, 2000, p. 5)

Through examples such as this one can see that Howe and Strauss are somewhat clear in their belief that the Millennial Generation is superior in many ways to the generations which precede the cohort. Specifically, in keeping with their own generational theory, they most closely relate Millennials to what they coin “The Greatest Generation”; that is the generation that fought World War Two and overcame the Great Depression.

It should be noted that Howe and Strauss are not social scientists or even historians by trade. Furthermore, their formative work of Millennial identification (Howe & Strauss, 2000), which has been so influential in shaping ideas concerning students and people in contemporary
education and policy, has no true empirical grounding outside of a study of some teacher surveys and the opinions of 600 students in Fairfax County, Virginia (one of the wealthiest municipalities in the nation). Instead its main basis lies in a conglomeration of pop-culture references and anecdotes. As one turns through the some 415 pages s/he will find extremely few citations of the deterministic claims Howe and Strauss make. Instead one finds quips from pop-culture in the margins and comic strips and cartoon pictures throughout the text (Howe & Strauss, 2000).

Not all proponents of generational theory paint such a positive picture of the generation cohort. Jean M. Twenge who dubs her own conceptualization of the generational cohort "Generation Me" notes many of the traits that Howe and Strauss view as largely positive have negative reverse sides (Twenge, 2006, 2009, 2010). In contrast to Howe and Strauss, Twenge is a social scientist who uses empirical techniques, mostly meta-analysis, to examine generational traits and reflect on the inferences. These notes are not meant to suggest that either work is of less worth, but rather to help the reader understand the different groundings associated with each.

Twenge associates her "Generation Me" with individuals "born after 1970, and especially after 1980" (Twenge, 2009 p. 399). This corresponds fairly well with Howe and Strauss’ notion of the Millenial Generation, particularly when one considers the emphasis placed on individuals born after 1980. The obvious difference, then, is that Twenge’s concept of the generational cohort includes portions of Howe and Strauss’ “13th Generation” which Howe and Strauss claim is antithetical to the Millennials (Howe & Strauss, 1991, 2000, 2007). The crux of this disagreement lies in Twenge’s inferences about the Millenial Generation which suggest that traits like selfishness, emphasis on leisure, and narcissism (traits which Howe and Strauss associate with the 13th Generation as opposed to Millennials) continue and are, in fact, amplified in individuals born after 1980.
Using questionnaire research, IQ examinations, personality typologies, attitude assessments, reading preferences, and longitudinal time-lag studies of high school students to examine “Generation Me”, Twenge suggest the following traits to be associated with the cohort. In general, Twenge asserts that members of “Generation Me” are highly assertive to the point of arrogance and narcissism. These individuals tend to exhibit higher levels of stress and anxiety which manifest in poorer mental health. As students these individuals prefer to engage reading less and as employees these individuals tend to want fewer or less rigid expectations as result of their increased focus on leisure. Finally “Generation Me” tends to score very low on indicators of self-reliance (Twenge, 2009).

Many of the traits described by Twenge seem to represent the “dark side” of the same traits described by Howe and Strauss. For instance Howe and Strauss’ confidence is Twenge’s arrogance. For Howe and Strauss, the Millennial Generation’s cohesiveness and teamwork is a boon, while Twenge’s research and inferences suggest such groupthink contributes to the handicap of low self-reliance. The two generational concepts agree the individuals in this cohort, whatever one chooses to call it, have high IQs and are highly motivated. The differences seem to come with the specific motives involved with cohort tendencies and the values one places on them.

Critique of Generational Theories. There are components of generational theories that are both compelling and problematic. On one hand, the perceived analytic and predictive power of generational concepts is interesting for educators, managers, advertisers, and others because the thought is that it helps these professionals reach out more effectively. On the other hand, disparity of theories and often contradictory analysis of the individuals who belong to generational cohorts lead some to question a veracity of generational theories suggesting such
work as "wrong," "unempirical," and "wildly mistaken" (Hoover, 2009). Furthermore some question the salience of attempting to describe an extremely complex cross section of American culture – including myriad permutations of class, race, gender, sexuality, creed, education level, etc. – with a unified stereotype (Levine & Cureton, 1998; Trzesniewski & Donnellan, 2010). There has even been significant quantitative and qualitative evaluation which suggests any claim of generational cohort effects is wholly inaccurate (Trzesniewski & Donnellan, 2010; Wong, Gardiner, Lang, & Coulon, 2008). Here we will look at some critique of a notion widely accepted in the field of student affairs (Bonner et al., 2011; Coomes & DeBard, 2004; DeBard, 2004; Gardner & Eng, 2005).

While generational cohort effects had been noted and theorized before Howe and Strauss’ contributions (Coupland, 1991; Jones, 1980; Mannheim, 1970; Ryder, 1965), it is suggested that mainstream acceptance of such ideology and indeed a new field surrounding generational studies was created by Howe and Strauss’ debut collaboration, Generations, in 1991 (Hoover, 2009). Soon after the release of Generations the book received criticism from reviewers and academics alike. Publishers Weekly (1991) described the piece as “trendy, detailed, convoluted (and) often woolly as newspaper horoscopes.” Furthermore, Arthur Levine, president of the Teachers College of Columbia University at the time, said "Generational images are stereotypes…there are some differences that stand out, but there are more similarities between students of the past and the present. But if you wrote a book saying that, how interesting would that book be?" (Hoover, 2009).

The notion that generational assumptions are over-generalized stereotypes suggests a troubling paradigm, particularly given that such credence is given to the idea of generational identity in student affairs. The notion of complete generalization of a cohort is seemingly
illogical, particularly with Millennials, because even those who coined the generations’ name suggest the cohort is the most diverse in history (Howe & Strauss, 1991, 2000, 2007). In other words, it seems unlikely that a generation purportedly comprised of the most difference in history is also sweepingly unified in its ideology. This critique is widely supported in the literature. Many authors suggest that while aspects of the generational theory presented by Howe and Strauss are compelling, a significant weakness is found in the theory’s almost singular attention to majority or privileged populations (Bonner et al., 2011; Broido, 2004; Coomes & DeBard, 2004; Dilworth & Carter, 2007). Bonner et al describe one such example in their (2009) analysis of generational conditions among white males versus African American males. They suggest that while white males typically enjoyed economically stable conditions, protection from government, indulgence from parents, and sheltering from the realities of the world; their African American counterparts experienced the exact opposite. It should be noted that such authors acknowledge the limitations of their own generalizations as well, but the point is sufficiently made here that a sweeping generalization of an entire generation is problematic.

Though Twenge, who explored a different idea regarding the motivations of the current cohort in her conceptualization of “Generation Me”, generally adheres to the assumption that there are indeed characteristics which define a generation cohort, she often acknowledges there are strong individual fluctuations within the cohort (Twenge, 2006, 2009, 2010). This is a concession that Howe and Strauss engage far less (Howe & Strauss, 1991, 2000, 2007). If significant evidence exists to suggest there is incongruence in the cogence of generational identity, then perhaps overarching societal influences have place in this analysis. While there are a number of events said to have affected the participant cohort’s birth generation (Howe & Strauss, 1991, 2000, 2007), this inquiry directly focuses on participant notions of higher
education administration and academics. For the purposes of this study, then, an exploration of mandatory U.S. educational policy during the participant’s lives and formative years seems most useful. Interestingly, the timeline associated with the education of the participant emerging professionals corresponds with the unprecedented concentrated movement toward accountability in schools and testing which has acted upon on the study participants.

**Educational Policy and Practice 1983 – Present.** It is important to address the educational environment in which emerging professionals were taught because the setting likely has some import with regards to the manners by which the participants view and conceive educational purpose. When examining the population from which participants will be drawn for this study there are several convenient connections in the timeline. Howe and Strauss (1991, 2000, 2007), the creators of the operationalized Millennial conceptualization of the generational cohort, suggest that the advent of the group was in 1982. Twenge, another major author on the subject suggests that members of her “Generation Me” seem to connect more vigorously to the generational stereotype post 1980 (Twenge, 2006, 2009, 2010). Simultaneously the U.S. education system was about to receive one of its most powerful moments of reform. This harbinger of this transformation was the 1983 essay “A Nation at Risk” (Education, 1983).

*A Nation at Risk* held that the economic, military, and technological dominance of the United States was undoubtedly threatened by a downward trend in the quality of American education (Education, 1983). What followed was a concentrated effort to federally control and mandate performance based accountability within the U.S. education system (Guthrie & Springer, 2004). Of the many possible assessments one might use to account for successful learning and development, the high stakes test seemed to be the vehicle of choice because it was perceived to be more objective and purported to produce easily measurable data (Au, 2007;
Gunzenhouser, 2003; Taubman, 2009). Content was whittled down, focused, and the curriculum became shaped by an emphasis on those subjects which seemed most pertinent to the claims made in *A Nation at Risk* (Education, 1983; Guthrie & Springer, 2004).

In the years since *A Nation at Risk*, further policy changes to these ends have been installed. The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2002 was, perhaps, more influential than *A Nation at Risk* because the latter was an ideological continuation and amplification of the former. In short, if *A Nation at Risk* was a call to hold schools accountable, NCLB was a deterministic plan, in law, to do so (McGuinn, 2005). NCLB increased federal control of public education by demanding that certain stipulations be made for schools to receive federal funding ("No Child Left Behind Act," 2002). Accountability measures for teachers and students were added and explicit values were placed on components of the curriculum deemed important to the administration (McGuinn, 2005). Specifically, the new laws valued reading and math skills as most important; mandating that such abilities should be tested in a standardized manner at specified intervals. Repercussions of success or failure on these examinations were designed to directly affect the student, teacher, and school in significant ways. As a result much was at stake each time a student lifted a number two pencil and tore the seal on their state created, federally controlled standardized test. The era of high stakes testing had begun.

*A Nation at Risk*, followed by No Child Left Behind profoundly changed the manners by which students are educated in the United States. The current cohort of emerging student affairs professionals will be one of the first that has been completely affected by these policy changes. High stakes testing and the shift in curriculum and pedagogy that accompanied this swing may have contributed more to the ways the emerging professionals view the world than proposed
generational cohort affects. Here, I will examine the manners by which many believe the testing and accountability movement has altered young people’s worldview.

**The High Stakes Testing Movement.** In the aftermath of *A Nation at Risk* and NCLB, a great deal of research was done regarding the effects of standardized testing on students and curriculum. Many of these studies suggest a primary effect of standardized testing has been that the content of curricula nation-wide has been narrowed, subject area knowledge has been fragmented, and that teacher-centered pedagogies have become normative (Au, 2007). There are examples of empirical evidence which suggests mathematical understanding has been whittled down to basic memorization of procedures and facts as opposed to conceptual, creative problem solving (Lomax, West, Harmon, Viator, & Madaus, 1995). Similarly, social studies have been largely reconceptualized into volumes of historical factoids (Grant, 2003). Additionally, other studies (Gerwin & Visone, 2006) found that teacher-centered instruction and factoid-driven lessons had increased markedly as a result of the recent implementation of their high stakes tests. Such trends highlight the idea that standardized tests have created a paradigm where discrete parcels of knowledge are valued above overarching concepts and high order thinking. Specifically, knowledge – the collection of facts – is of greater value than knowing – the act of understanding and grappling with a concept (Noble, 2002; Taubman, 2009).

While these alarming trends are the dominant tendency since NCLB (Au, 2007; Noble, 2002; Taubman, 2009), it is also suggested that in rare cases standardized testing has generated an opposite effect. Though examples of this counter-movement are unusual, some studies showed an increase in interactional and student-centered pedagogies (Wolleman-Bonilla, 2004). Similar results were reported in social studies programs scattered throughout the nation as well (Barton, 2005; Libresco, 2005). Indeed, a majority of the cases for curricular expansion come
from this latter social studies phenomenon. This is likely due to the fact that social studies have only recently been added to federal demands of testing and the resulting standardization (or lack thereof) is incongruent across the nation (Au, 2007).

Of particular interest of this portion of the discussion is the 2007 meta-analysis of studies regarding standardized testing effects by Wayne Au published in the *Educational Researcher*. Au (2007) completed a metasynthesis of 49 qualitative studies finished between 1992 and 2006 (46 since 2003). Each study represented qualitative inquiry into the impact of standardized testing in a given school system, subject, or testing instrument. Au chose only to work with qualitative studies because he felt “their focus on human interaction and day to day functioning of the schools and classrooms” (p. 259) was paramount. Au used three a priori codes for template analysis (Crabtree & Miller, 1999) of the 49 studies. These a priori codes included: subject matter content, pedagogy, and structure of knowledge. After completing the metasynthesis, Au concluded that the evidence suggested studies generally discovered a binary wherein implementation of a standardized test either broadened the educational experience or narrowed it. Broadening the experience was described as expanding subject matter, integrating knowledge forms, and moving towards student-centered pedagogy. Narrowing the experience represented the opposite wherein subject matter was contracted, knowledge forms were fractured, and pedagogy moved towards teacher-centered. Specific connections and results will be illuminated below, but in general, Au found that Narrowing of the experience was a far more common result than broadening the curriculum (Au, 2007).

Au (2007) states that within the template code of subject matter content, the overwhelming finding was that standardized testing forced teachers to contract the content of their subject matter. Of the 49 studies synthesized, 41 indicated an alteration in subject matter,
34 indicated they contracted the scope of the subject matter, and only 14 (less than a third) suggested they were able to expand subject matter. Furthermore, Au suggests that “the narrowing of content was strongest among participants in the studies that focused on secondary education” (p. 262). It is of import that the phenomena increases as students approach higher education.

With regards to knowledge form, the second code template, Au suggests “there is a strong relationship between high-stakes testing, and teacher’s increasing the fragmentation of knowledge” (2007, p. 262). 34 studies indicate some effect on the form of knowledge being taught. 24 suggested a more fragmented curriculum where only ten (around one fifth) indicated curricular integration. Such a relationship implies that emerging professionals were raised and educated in systems which valued fragmented, discrete knowledge components far more often than integrated understanding and knowing.

The final code template, pedagogy, suggested perhaps the greatest gap in effects. Of the 49 original studies, 38 indicated a change in pedagogy, 32 suggested a shift towards teacher-centered instruction, while only ten (12%) made the case for student-centered learning. While each template code is germane to the discussion of emerging student affairs professionals, this final idea is very powerful. The field of student affairs, indeed, higher education in general, requires a great deal of student participation. This indicator seems to suggest that, as a result of standardized testing, students are becoming less familiar with student-led discussions, activities, and general student-centered pedagogy.

At this point it is difficult to say how the general finding in Au’s (2007) analysis inform the specific population of emerging student affairs professionals. But it should be noted that Au’s work is not a quantitative examination, nor were the studies which he synthesized. This
means inferences were not made from numbers in order to suggest a correlation between stimuli and outcomes. Rather, the studies in question, dealt with teachers acknowledging that they absolutely did alter their methods in one way or another. It is difficult to imagine that in an environment described as consistently and generally narrowing and fragmenting, that emerging professionals have emerged unaffected.

**Commodification.** The previous section outlined the manners by which educational policy largely narrowed curriculum and content of schooling into simple, straightforward factoids as opposed to maintaining an expectation of higher order thinking. The emerging professionals who speak during the vignette in chapter one often behave as though they prefer simple ideas and expectations in academe and student affairs. This can be connected to a phenomenon known as commodification. The word commodification is often used imprecisely in contemporary education literature, so it is important to be clear how one uses the term (Noble, 2001). Noble (2002) defines a commodity as “something created, grown, produced, or manufactured for exchange on the market” (Noble, 2001, pp. 2-3). For the purpose of this study, commodification in education refers to the “interruption of fundamental educational process(es) and the disintegration and distillation of the educational experience into discrete, reified, and ultimately saleable things” (Noble, 2001, p. 3). A broad example of this phenomenon is the manner by which testing has fragmented and reduced the scope of secondary school curriculum (Au, 2007).

An example of commodification among emerging student affairs professionals is found in the vignette, wherein the third candidate troubles a question when he was expected to provide easily digestible information. In the story, after the candidate chooses not to give an overly simplistic response, an emerging professional in the vignette states the candidate “wasn’t able to
define things as clearly”. In this statement one notices the lack of value the quoted individual places on complex engagement as opposed to factoids and instructions. Furthermore, the expressed notion that “(the candidate) can’t do anything for my career” leads one to question if emerging professionals might also feel complex concepts have little material value when compared to commodified parcels of information.

This notion of commodification is opposed to an alternative wherein education represents an ongoing complex conversation of ideas and applications. Such a distinction may best be described by highlighting the difference between training and education. Noble (2001) defines training as a process which “entails a set of skills, to become operational, only in a context determined by someone other than the trained individual” (p. 2). In other words, in a training environment, knowledge is expected to produce a specific result or product that is utilitarian and disassociated from the learner. In contrast, Noble (2001) suggests education entails knowledge that is inseparable from the learner and, therefore is unable to be owned or exchanged in a simple, direct fashion. Though the vocational preparation which has permeated modern universities post-industrialization (Thelin, 2004) lends itself more closely to Noble’s (2001) notion of training, the educational paradigm is more suited to the student development student affairs purports to engage.

The coexistence of commodified notions (training) and more holistic epistemologies (education) suggests emerging student affairs professionals have learned and worked with both types of learning. If this is true, an emerging professional’s challenge centers on the recognition that they are both administrators within, and recent products of, this same complex system that simultaneously promotes a training epistemology with regards to career preparation and educational viewpoint in holistic development. However, if a commodified view of learning is
the default for emerging professionals, it is possible that an imbalance between training and education has been allowed. This potential exists if the ontology of commodification among emerging professionals as students is carried over into their practice as administrators. An important goal of this study is to understand how these functions – roles as administrators and students – and epistemologies – notions of education and training – inform the understandings of emerging professionals within the institution.

Foundational literature on the field of student affairs suggests that emerging professionals in administrative roles “claim a proud tradition of supporting and enriching millions for college student’s personal and academic lives” (Komives & Woodard, 1996, p. xvii). However, these professionals are expected to support university missions and academic programs which, in general, purport access to vocational certification (Noble, 2002, Thelin 2004). Localized anecdotes and quotations from emerging student affairs professionals, like those highlighted in the vignette above, suggest that these seemingly countervailing expectations of simultaneous training and education lend themselves to the complex manners by which emerging student affairs professionals construct notions of success and purpose as they take their place in administrative functions in the university. Examining how roles as students and practitioners have shaped emerging professionals’ world views is important for this inquiry.

**Higher Education and Student Affairs**

Understanding how greater U.S. ideology has commodified higher education may be another key environmental factor for emerging student affairs professionals. I have discussed how the commodification of K-12 education may have impacted the participant’s world views concerning purpose during the formative years of emerging professionals’ educational experience. Here I will address the manners by which on overarching climate of
commodification – connected to a movement toward educational accountability – has impacted the field of student affairs within higher education. I will begin with a brief foundational review of the historical conceptualizations of the purpose of higher education and student affairs. This will be followed by a review of current literature which operationalizes contemporary expectations surrounding new professionals in the field of student affairs.

**Purpose in Higher Education.** It has been suggested that the foundations of U.S. higher education were never about preparing one for a career (Lucas, 2006; Thelin, 2010, 2011). Instead the university existed to liberate one’s mind and create educated problem solvers who would become the de facto aristocracy in the colonies and later America’s fledgling democracy. This was the traditional English liberal arts design wherein the curriculum was based around the Trivium (Grammar, Logic, and Rhetoric) and Quadrivium (Arithmetic, Geometry, Music and Astronomy). This was a curriculum designed around what educators described as the “thinking skills” from ancient Greek and Roman liberal arts curriculum as opposed to the skills referred to as practical (such as architecture or medicine) (Thelin, 2010, 2011).

Thelin (2011) and Lucas (2006) go on to say that, as the industrial and scientific revolutions took hold in the mid nineteenth century, earning a living became a more technocratic endeavor. At this point colleges and universities became more about certification and vocational preparation. Additionally the land grant bills ("Land Grant Aid of Colleges," 1862; "Secretary of Agriculture to administer annual college-aid appropriation," 1890) established that many state universities would serve the public through research and human resource preparation. This led to and continues to feed increased access to higher education as a result of the utilitarian need for highly skilled workers (Noble, 2001, 2002). Such events mark a significant change since the original paradigm of liberal arts education in American universities.
However, faculty and staff noticed that students were failing in colleges and universities around the country into the mid twentieth century. Matriculation and graduation rates had generally plummeted and students were becoming increasingly unruly. This was perceived as a consequence of a movement away from *en loco parentis* (in place of the parent), because students had no support during transitional periods (Thelin, 2011). One outgrowth of supporting the failing students was the creation of positions and programs that would come to be known as the field of student affairs (Lucas, 2006; Thelin, 2010, 2011). The purpose and/or function of student affairs is articulated differently dependent upon whom engages the subject. Thelin (2011) and Lucas (2006) suggest the primary function of the field is to support the mission of the university by maintaining academic persistence and good behavior among students. Nuss (1996) and Day et al. (2004) insist the field of student affairs has always been committed to the development of the whole person. In other words, they suggest student affairs was a necessary development as faculty were forced to become more devoted to research, teaching, and service, than caring for students *en loco parentis*.

As universities, particularly those now delineated as Carnegie research institutions, grew, expanded and evolved into the complex systems of contemporary higher education, scholars and administrators sought new ways to understand such organizations. Clark Kerr (2001) conceptualized such universities as having “many parts (which) can be added or subtracted with little effect on the whole or even little notice taken or any blood spilled” (p. 15). Kerr goes on to explain the governance functions as a city-state saying “(the university) may be inconsistent, but must be governed – not as the guild it once was, but as a complex entity with greatly fractionalized power.” (Kerr, 2001 p.15). Such a multiplicity of controls is corroborated by Birnbaum (1989). In essence, the university is controlled by a number of overarching factions
such as students, faculty, staff, and administrators which wield power and control in a variety of manners such as collegial consensus (faculty collegiums), democratic assemblies (as in student government or staff senate), and a number of other politically and financially driven systems (Birnbaum, 1989; Kerr, 2001). Kerr and Birnbaum also discuss the influence the forces external to the university such as state and federal governments, employers, and tuition-paying parents and students which effect governance.

Ultimately the complex, nuanced, and ever-changing face of the institution Kerr referred to as “a multiversity” does not have a single purpose, nor do the components of the multiversity necessarily agree on several purposes. Kerr (2001) highlights this saying “A community should have a soul, a single animating principle; the multiversity has several – some of them quite good, although there is debate on which souls really deserve salvation.” (p.15) While the concept of this immensely complicated “multiversity” has applications in many areas, I use the multiversity concept as a lens for addressing the stakeholders of student affairs expectations. Here students, student affairs professionals, some faculty, and external influences such as professional organizations and accreditation agencies affect not only expectations for professional practice, but ideologies of purpose within student affairs.

**Emerging Professionals in Higher Education Literature.** The expressed concerns this research hopes to engage are low job satisfaction and higher attrition among new professionals – a topic that has become popular in the literature in recent years. In general, such literature tends to focus on the environment of the new professional or is conceptualized as a set of tools for successful operation as a new professional (Amey & Ressor, 1998; Lovell & Kosten, 2000; Tull, 2006; Tull et al., 2009). Graduate preparation, supervision, training, and induction expectations are among environmental foci, whereas the tools for new professionals add topics such as
socialization, institutional culture, and professional organizations. Each of these entries into the literature is useful and well written; however they do not approach notions of intrinsic definition of emerging professional purpose in any empirical way. Primary areas of focus include: institutional culture and professional competencies; preparation, induction, training, and supervision; and job satisfaction.

**Institutional Culture and Professional Competencies.** The extant literature illustrates that the modern university is a complex institution with multiple missions (Birnbaum, 1989; Kerr, 2001). As a result, no two institutions are the same and organizational culture varies greatly between universities. A number of sources suggest that selecting a work place with a culture that connects with one’s own values is a large contributor to job satisfaction (Amey & Ressor, 1998; Lovell & Kosten, 2000; Tull, 2006; Tull et al., 2009). An important factor in this area is the manners by which new professionals are socialized into an institution. Authors often stress the role of supervisors and employers in bridging the gap between graduate preparation and professional life (Tull, 2006; Tull et al., 2009). Furthermore it is suggested that supervisor expectations be clearly defined and new professionals have some authorship of how performance is monitored and measured.

The expressed need to define and measure generalized expectations has led to the development of professional competencies. A joint publication by ACPA and NASPA (the two primary professional organizations within student affairs) describes competency areas as follows:

“(The) set of Professional Competency Areas is intended to define the broad professional knowledge, skills, and in some cases, attitudes expected of student affairs professionals regardless of their area of specialization or positional role within the field. All student affairs practitioners should be able to demonstrate their ability to meet the basic list of outcomes under each competency area regardless of how they entered the profession. (Bresciani & Todd, 2010, p. 3)
In general the competency areas in the joint document include: advising and helping; assessment, evaluation, and research; equity, diversity, and inclusion; ethical professional practice, history, philosophy, and values; human and organizational resources; law, policy, and governance; leadership, personal foundations, and student learning and development (Bresciani & Todd, 2010).

Recently a number of studies have emerged addressing the notion of competencies for new professionals (e.g. Burkard et al., 2004; Herdlein, 2004; Lovell & Kosten, 2000). Dickerson et al. (2011) most recently addressed competencies required specifically of new professionals by building on each of these prior works to generate new understandings surrounding professional competencies. Dickerson et al. compared expectations of new professional competencies among senior student affairs officers and higher education graduate faculty. The overwhelming finding of this comparison was that faculty and senior student affairs officers agreed on nearly every identified competency suggesting a coherent expectation of new professional capabilities.

Preparation. I have suggested a coherent expectation of new professional performance from both the professional side of the field and graduate preparation courses as demonstrated by general agreement on professional competencies. The manners by which new professionals are taught to meet the extensive expectations outlined in the professional competencies are said to be central to how likely they are to be satisfied and remain in the field (Amey & Ressor, 1998; Harned & Murphy, 1998; Herdlein, 2004; Hirt, 2006; Palmer, 1995; Richmond & Sherman, 1991). Here I will review some of the calls for change in preparation, induction, training and supervision.

A number of student affairs researchers have suggested that graduate preparation is central to the development of new student affairs professionals (Amey & Ressor, 1998; Harned
While offering different viewpoints and values, the general consensus among the articles calls for a more practical grounding in graduate programs and an emphasis on best practices and data-driven assessment. Renn and Jessup-Anger (2008), through an extended method of surveying student affairs professionals across disciplines, identified five emergent themes regarding graduate preparation. Renn and Jessup-Anger implore graduate faculty to “Make the implicit explicit: use coursework to frame professional identity and student affairs work” (p. 329). They specifically suggest the practitioners learn far more from assistantships than from coursework. Renn and Jessup-Anger suggest faculty “Provide a compass: Prepare graduates to read and navigate new organizational cultures” (p. 330). This connects to the importance of understanding institutional culture as an area of new professional research. Renn and Jessup-Anger also recommended that faculty and practitioners should “Expect individual responsibility for professional development” (p. 331) going on to suggest instilling such motivations in emerging professionals is important. Additionally, Renn and Jessup-Anger call for those in student affairs to “Build a culture of feedback and accountability: Promote effective use of supervisors and mentors” (p. 332). Renn and Jessup-Anger place an emphasis on “Be(ing) data-driven (and) us(ing) best practices in research and assessment to understand learning and professional development outcomes of individual graduate programs and the field as a whole” (p. 333). Renn and Jessup-Anger’s comments provide an excellent summary of the suggestions from research into graduate preparation.

**Induction and Training.** Induction and training naturally follow graduate preparation, because they immediately follow graduation from the higher education master’s degree. In an edited volume by Tull et al. (2009), a number of authors describe various aspects of this process.
Denise Collins (2009), citing the four realms of professional practice (Hirt & Creamer, 1998), discusses the impacts of induction with regard to the personal, institutional, extra-institutional, and professional realms. Rosser and Janiver (2009) focus on aspects of motivation and satisfaction during induction which seem closely tied to acceptance and finding purpose. Hirt also suggests that institutional culture is most important to a new professionals’ experience of induction into the field (Hirt, 2006, 2009). Much of the literature surrounding expectations of the Millennial Generation, that I discussed previously, is supported by Freeman and Taylor (2009) as they suggest strategies for inducting highly motivated new professionals that require constant attention. Additionally, the roles graduate programs, orientation initiatives, peer relationships, and professional organizations play in induction to the field are increasingly important in the field of student affairs (Carpenter & Carpenter, 2009; Janosik, 2009; Kuk & Cuyjet, 2009; S. Saunders & cooper, 2009; Strayhorn, 2009; Tull, 2009). The processes of induction and training are central to much of the empirical studies on new professionals in student affairs.

**Supervision.** Supervision is, perhaps, the most influential impact on a new professional world-view within the field of student affairs (Tull, 2006, 2009; Winston & J.B., 2003). Returning to the expressed concerns of job satisfaction and attrition, both of these concerns seem closely linked to a new professional’s experience with his or her supervisor (Amey, 2002). In general, research on the topic places heavy emphasis on building a strong relationship with one’s supervisor (Tull, 2006, 2009; Winston & J.B., 2003). This approach often resembles a partnership as opposed to hierarchical structure, though it is clear there are nuanced integrations of management and supervision. Such a recognition of countervailing structures is central to the notions of a complex often contradictory system within the university (i.e. Birnbaum, 1989;
Kerr, 2001). As a result of the complex university environment, the supervisory relationship is an important and difficult component of new professional development.

**Links to Job Satisfaction and Implications for the Study.** Institutional culture, professional expectations, and the manner by which new professionals are inducted and supervised are suggested to have great impacts on the success and retention of new professionals to the field (Herdlein, 2004; Tull, 2006, 2009; Tull et al., 2009). This section has reviewed some of the literature surrounding these concepts and highlighted that the literature is generally focused on aspects external to the new professional’s locus of control. It is true to aspects such as developing a relationship with one’s supervisor or choosing an institution which matches one’s values are highly dependent on intrinsic motivations, but the studies themselves do not specifically inquire as to the internal source of said decisions. I seek to address the gap left in the literature wherein emerging professional notions of purpose have not been interrogated. Such an exploration may contribute or illuminate further research into the concerns of new professional job satisfaction and attrition.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this literature review was three-fold. First, the literature review served to ground my operationalized definition of purpose within the theoretical frames of self-authorship and transition theory. Furthermore, the construct of self-understanding is applied as an alternative to identity because self-understanding indicated a less complete construct. Second, the environmental connections between society and education were highlighted and the concept of commodification was connected to anecdotal observed behavior among emerging professionals. Finally, a review of contemporary student affairs literature on new professionals
demonstrated a high interest in this subject, but decidedly external approach to engaging new professionals. This study seeks to contribute to the literature in that intrinsic properties of emerging professionals will be explored.
CHAPTER III - METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of discovering purpose within student affairs among emerging student affairs professionals. A qualitative approach specifically conceived through a phenomenological lens was, therefore, appropriate. The primary research question was “how do emerging student affairs professionals experience discovering purpose within student affairs?”

Qualitative Traditions and Lenses

Articulation of purpose that is rooted in self-authorship is an individual characteristic shaped by the world in which one lives, but is ultimately determined by the choices the individual makes when constructing identity (Baxter Magolda, 2001; Hodge et al., 2009). Qualitative methods are best for engaging phenomena such as this discovery of purpose because such phenomena are subjective and represent multiple world views (Lichtman, 2006).

Phenomenology is one of several major qualitative methodologies identified by Lichtman (2006). Edmund Husserl is often credited with first employing phenomenology in the early 1900s although Kant is acknowledged as having first used the term in 1764 (Lichtman, 2006). van Manen (1990) pointed out that “offering causal explanations of interpretive generalization (p. 54)” is not the purpose of phenomenology. Instead, analysis of participant stories consists of acknowledging emergent themes which are then focused into a smaller set of themes in order to report the essence of an experience (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). Lichtmen (2006) explains one might begin with 25 themes which are then narrowed to three essential components. Based on such descriptions of phenomenological techniques, I have chosen to employ a
phenomenological lens because such methods are best for describing lived experience (Creswell, 2009; Johnson & Christensen, 2008; Lichtman, 2006).

The process of focusing a participant’s story of lived experience into themes followed by a rich description of essence helps a researcher come to a deeper understanding of the experience (Bottorf, 2003; Johnson & Christensen, 2008). Both Creswell (1998) and Lichtman (2006) describe this essence as being rooted in a structural commonality of experience. Johnson and Christensen (2008) explain:

“Consider the death of a loved one. Certainly, each of us reacts to and experiences this event differently (i.e., the idiosyncratic of variant structure). However there are probably essences to this experience that are common to everyone (i.e., the common or invariant structure). For example, in the case of death of a loved one, grief and sorrow would probably be elements of the common experience” (p. 397)

Acknowledging the presence of a structure which represents commonality of human experience allows for a telling of story that potentially goes beyond one individual without ignoring individual experiences.

A number of qualitative lenses might have shed light on the problem of low job satisfaction and high attrition among emerging professional in student affairs. However, Creswell (2009) explains that phenomenology is appropriate for a study that examines an experience such as discovering purpose in student affairs, because of the emphasis on the lived experience of discovering purpose. This qualitative study used phenomenology as a lens to transform participant experiences into a textual exposition which not only represented the stories authentically, but explicated the essence of any common experience(s) of discovering purpose.

The use of the term lens is important to the methodology and ultimately the methods by which I handled participant stories. While this study was certainly qualitative in nature and predominantly utilized phenomenological methods, some aspects of how emergent themes were
noted strayed from more traditional notions of phenomenology. Typically, methodologists suggest that preconceived notions be “bracketed” or suspended so that the essence of an experience emerges directly from the stories (Johnson & Christensen, 2008; Lichtman, 2006). Bracketing was used as a means of clarifying research bias within me and capturing more authentic participant experiences, but the aforementioned notions of self-authorship and transition theory served as place marker for identifying an event or non-event related to discovery of purpose. In other words, preconceived concepts of self-authorship and transition theory were acknowledged, but not fully suspended in my bracketing procedure.

Some aspects of narrative method were also useful in addition to the study’s primary phenomenological lens. Because I was focused on telling participant stories through a phenomenological lens, narrative method was an effective way to share those stories. Clandinin and Connelly (1995, 1999) offered a narrative-based phenomenological approach which certainly had application in this study. Clandinin and Connelly focused on the story of knowledge production among participants. In the case of my topic, the story of how emerging professionals’ produced knowledge that was centered on discovering purpose was better shared using such a narrative lens. This secondary lens, combined with the primary lens of phenomenology, created a potent methodological framework with which to explore the research question.

**Theoretical Lens: Self Authorship and Transition Theory**

With this study I sought to report the essence of phenomena surrounding the lived experience of discovering purpose in student affairs among emerging professionals. Notions of self-authorship and navigation of transitions were central to how one defines identity and purpose (Evans et al., 1998; Schlossberg et al., 1995). The field of student affairs often relies on
psychosocial and identity development theories to assist with formulating response and programs to help students succeed (Evans et al., 1998). These constructive theories make sense of how individuals construct meaning and identity through lived experience. Some of these theories are generally focused (e.g. Chickering & Reisser, 1993) whereas others speak to specific individuals who share identity based on a trait such as race (e.g. Cross, 1978, 1995), gender (e.g. Josselson, 1982, 1996), or sexuality (e.g. Cass, 1979; D'Augelli, 1991). Such psychosocial and identity development theories could have certainly been used as frame for exploring purpose among emerging professionals, but transition theory (Evans et al., 1998; Schlossberg et al., 1995) is most useful for driving towards the essence of discovering purpose. Marcia Baxter Magolda’s notion of self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2001; Hodge et al., 2009) will also be of use because the theory drives towards the choices one makes when constructing identity for themselves. I will briefly discuss both concepts below.

**Transition Theory**

As I discussed in chapter two, transition theory is used to address the experiences of individuals as they encounter events or non-events that alter the manners by which the individual views the world. Transition theory was appropriate for this study because discovering purpose in student affairs signifies a transition of identity within the emerging professional. Using transition theory as a lens assisted with coding participant stories by allowing the participants and I to identify important events and/or non-events which affected individual notions of purpose in student affairs. Additionally the coping methods surrounding situation, self, support, and strategies outlined by Schlossberg et al. (1995) served as a bridge to self-authorship as my other theoretical lens.
**Self-Authorship**

Self-authorship is a concept which describes the manners by which individuals make meaning of transitional moments (Baxter Magolda, 2001). While I have discussed transition theory (Schlossberg et al., 1995) as a way of helping identify traits surrounding discovery of purpose in the field of student affairs, the coping strategies category within transition theory dovetails directly into Baxter Magolda’s construct of self-authorship (Hodge et al., 2009). Details of the self-authorship concept have been discussed in chapter two, but will be put into practice in the methods of the study. It was important to identify if notions of purpose are informed by external influence (external formulas), self-authored understanding, or somewhere in between (crossroads) (Hodge et al., 2009) throughout thematic analysis of participant stories. Additionally Baxter Magolda’s dimensions of self-authorship (epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal) were used to help code and group themes.

**Interview Design**

Interviews were used as the data collection strategy for this qualitative inquiry because the methods relied upon a phenomenological lens (Creswell, 1998; Johnson & Christensen, 2008; Lichtman, 2006). The interview protocol was designed to elicit stories regarding moments wherein emerging professionals defined and discovered purpose. Some questions also sought to illuminate conceptualizations of purpose at the time of the interview. Other questions encouraged the telling of stories in different ways. For instance asking a participant to describe how he or she goes about explaining his or her role to a family member versus a peer elicited different responses in each interview. The interviews were emergent based on participant
responses; however the interview protocol (Appendix A) was used as a guide for the conversations.

Participants

Participants were purposefully sampled as is traditional in qualitative methods and because of the study’s phenomenological nature, criterion sampling was used. Participants were required to be either 1) currently participating in the university’s higher education administration master’s degree program or 2) currently serving in the first three years of an entry-level student affairs role within a department in Student Life. These criteria were used to help limit the participant pool to maintain the structures which contribute to commonality of experience described by Johnson & Christensen (2008) and Lichtman (2006).

Identifying potential participants required gaining cooperation from principle faculty in the higher education administration program as well as administrative support from the Vice Chancellor over the division including Student Life. Potential participants were contacted via email (Appendix B). This communication was used to introduce myself, explain the study, and invite participation. Creswell (1998) suggests that between 5 and 25 participants is an appropriate number because one wants to elicit detail of experience, but still maintain a connection of the shared experiences between interviews. Creswell (1998) explains that if the sample is too large, deep data regarding experience overloads the analytical capabilities of the researcher. On the other hand, too few interviews do not provide enough points of view to establish thematic connections. Once individual interest was received, a second email thanking potential participants for contributing to the study was sent with a brief questionnaire (appendix C). This short questionnaire helped ensure sampling criteria were met. Ultimately eight individuals from the same research institution in the Southeast United States were selected.
Research Site

While participants from the study came from a variety of backgrounds, genders, races, and locations, all were currently either attending coursework or serving within the same university. This southeastern, predominantly white, research institution was also the site of the study. In 2011 the institution enrolled over 28,000 students within 70 bachelor’s degree programs, 73 master’s degree programs and 49 doctoral programs. The student affairs administration master’s program at the research site had been reactivated 5 years prior to the study after several years of non-existence. Politically the institution is situated in a conservative southern state with significant financial concerns. The university had been under threat of mid-year budget cuts for three consecutive years at the time of writing. Most undergraduate students at the university come from a parochial education and many attend university on partial or full scholarship from the state. The university had a very active student population that is heavily rooted in a very popular athletic program. As such, the university was very well known so as to attract many out-of-state graduate students. Such wide spread recruiting can be seen in the diversity of the study’s participants.

Researcher Positionality

It is here that I submit my own positionality into this discourse. My path to student affairs was unorthodox even by student affairs standards. While a vast majority of student affairs practitioners do not choose a career path in student affairs until sometime during their bachelor’s degree, I did not do so until late in my graduate studies. I was very active in student affairs through my undergraduate and graduate student employment in residential life, however it was always my intent to work in a K-12 setting. Despite my passion for K-12 music education I
found a greater connection to working with undergraduate students and ultimately sought a career in student affairs after graduating from my master’s program. Such a passion was inspired by my feelings that the student affairs field represents one of the last true spaces for liberal education in the modern research university.

My belief that student affairs can provide supplemental development akin to the liberal arts curriculum of the colonial colleges stems from my life and work in residential life. As an undergraduate student, I was consistently amazed by how the life-lessons learned outside of the classroom, particularly in my residence hall, impacted me far more than any coursework that I engaged. Furthermore, through over 11 years of service in residential life, I found the additional student development that student affairs provides as a great benefit to contemporary students.

I strongly believe that the field of student affairs serves an important non-academic and non-administrative role within the university. Simply put, I feel that college is about more than preparation for a career and the university should be about more than financially sustaining itself. With these beliefs in mind, I must also acknowledge that connections to academic career preparation and administrative functions are important in student affairs work as well. Primarily however, I believe the university should create interdependent citizens who are prepared to lead our nation and world ethically and justly.

In my time as a student affairs practitioner I have also seen an alarming trend wherein the field student affairs has sought to make itself more academic. Additionally, the field has become increasingly focused on administration of maintaining Grade Point Averages and retention to the university. For me, the field’s move towards the academic and/or administrative functions of the university represents a shift away from the original purpose of student affairs. Academic and student affairs functions serve two separate and important roles in the university. Here, I seek to
acknowledge these two vastly different functions and, perhaps, voice a warning against losing the balance between the two. Simply put, I believe the purpose of student affairs is primarily that of teaching and learning (a holistic compliment to the vocational classroom) while academic and administrative connections should exist only to the point necessary to maintain student learning and the function of the institution. In such a paradigm success of programs would then be measured not only by Grade Point Average, graduation rate, and career placement, but also by students’ interdependent contribution to democratic society, wellness, and happiness before and after graduation. Thus, I believe the field of student affairs should focus on a primary goal towards engendering notions of purpose surrounding holistic student development. Secondarily, training and support for academic and administrative roles should follow.

Entry and Reciprocity

Qualitative methods require that some level of “entry” into the world of the participants is achieved (Lichtman, 2006). Because I was already “in” the field of student affairs and had experienced the role of the emerging professional first-hand, a connection to the participants already existed from a professional point of view. Additionally, participants were willing to contribute to the study by virtue of their own choice to volunteer. The endorsement of the Vice Chancellor, chief faculty members, and Institutional Review Board also served to make participants feel more comfortable with the process. Finally, entry was eased by giving potential participants full access to this proposal and informed consent documentation (Appendix D), which guaranteed confidentiality, prior to participation in the study.

An important feature of the phenomenological lens is that the method does not demand interpretation. This meant that participants could be assured that this study offered a venue for their stories to be told. Helping emerging professionals tell their stories offered a small measure
of reciprocity. This reciprocity was shared with each participant. Before each interview, the importance of participant stories was underscored so participants understood that while they were helping with the study, the study also offered them a small benefit as well because the data gathered could help improve emerging professionals’ experiences.

**Data Collection**

A focus on telling the stories of lived experience dictated that interviewing was the most powerful data collection strategy (Creswell, 1998). Each participant shared his or her story in an interview which lasted approximately 30 minutes. Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. Open ended questions from the interview protocol were used as beginning points with follow-up questions stemming from participant responses. These follow-up questions were used to further understand attitudes and opinions about the events and/or non-events surrounding any expressed discovery of purpose or lack thereof. Qualitative data regarding participant feelings about certain events or non-events helped tell a richer story of those happenings rather than simply reporting the occurrence itself (Creswell, 2002). Understanding the event/non-event surrounding discovering purpose, its context, and the participant’s thoughts about the event/non-event were crucial to understanding the lived experience of the participants.

**Data Analysis**

Qualitative data analysis in this study adhered to many conventions of phenomenology. Participant stories were transcribed and thematically coded. Coding was completed in several rounds. First, significant statements were identified and coded. Then codes were refined and clustered into like meanings. These overarching theme clusters were then further refined into essential themes centered on important transitional events (i.e. Schlossberg et al., 1995). These
themes helped describe the essence of the events surrounding discovery of purpose or lack thereof both structurally (how the phenomenon was experienced) and texturally (what was experienced). Ultimately, thematic patterns emerged which shed light on manners by which emerging professionals grapple with making meaning in the field of student affairs.

**Initial Coding.** In order to fully connect to the data, transcripts and interview recordings were reviewed multiple times with each transcript being read and listened to once during each round of coding. Significant statements were identified and marked with brief hand-written descriptive code. This process was repeated multiple times with a clean copy of the transcript used for each subsequent review. This was done so I could examine participant’s stories from as fresh a perspective as was possible without becoming habitual about codes based on the prior rounds of analysis. This process continued through four rounds of coding until no new themes were noted when reviewing all of my own notes through multiple readings.

**Purpose Revisited.** After the initial review of transcripts, it became clear that a complex landscape regarding discovering purpose in student affairs was present in the data. Based on emergent, data-driven themes, my operationalized definition of purpose was further specified. My original operationalized definition of purpose was *an individual’s self-understanding of his or her objective within student affairs.* Based on the traditional definition of the word “purpose” ("Purpose," n.d.) and emergent codes I updated the operational definition of purpose to *a self-authored, determined and resolute focus within student affairs that is action oriented, intentional, and impactful.*

**Refined Coding.** Based on the revised definition of purpose the transcripts were coded once more, this time using the qualitative data suite Atlas TI and referencing previous rounds of
hand written coding. After this final round of coding, executive summaries of each participant’s
coded interview transcript were produced. Each executive summary included the codes
associated with significant statements in a given interview. Furthermore, the executive summary
was ordered chronologically as described by the participants’ recounting of their own stories.
The group of eight executive summaries was then coded, gathered together and connected with
similar codes and transitional events in analytical codes called clusters. These clusters allowed
me to step back from the specificity of an individual experience and describe the structures of
common experience (Creswell, 1998). For this process I drew on the work of Colaizzi (1978) in
order to focus the original thematic material into a few essential common themes. Using a
method described as “horizontalization”, Colaizzi suggests that a researcher should begin by
getting a feel for the participants’ inherent meanings during review of transcripts so that
significant statements can be identified (Creswell, 2002). I was able to identify significant
statements and patterns and continued with Colaizzi’s suggestion to restate the statements in my
own words in order to formulate meaning (Colaizzi, 1978). Such a process allowed me to take
many voices and translate them into a unified manner of describing the experience in order to
assist with clustering the codes. I then fully described the code clusters and shared the
fundamental structure or essence of participant experiences with participants in order to finely
tune the analysis and to better illuminate the research question (Colaizzi, 1978; Creswell, 2002).

An example of the manners by which codes evolved in this emergent analysis can be seen
below in table 3.1. The figure illustrates how codes surrounding “the call to join student affairs”
evolved during the course of coding into essential themes which highlight underlying thematic
structure.
Table 3.1

Coding Evolution Example

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial Coding (Significant Statements)</th>
<th>Code Clusters</th>
<th>Executive Summary Coding</th>
<th>Essential Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Invitation to Join Student Affairs</td>
<td>Invitation to Join Student Affairs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggestion to join student Affairs</td>
<td>The request to join Student Affairs</td>
<td>Invitation/Suggestion/Request to Join Student Affairs</td>
<td>The Call to Student Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asking about joining student Affairs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeking to join Student Affairs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preferred Student Affairs over chosen career path</td>
<td>Diverting to Student Affairs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choice to abandon career for Student Affairs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Verification and Validity

There are a number of strategies for strengthening the validity of a qualitative study. Creswell (2009) suggests that qualitative researchers should use at least one, and preferably several, of the following strategies: triangulation, member checking, rich/thick description, bias clarification, reporting of negative or discrepant information, prolonged time in the field, peer debriefing, and the use of an external auditor. This study employed four of these techniques including: triangulation, member checking, bias clarification, and debriefing/auditing from a peer and/or external source.

**Triangulation.** Triangulation involves using different “data sources of information by examining evidence from the sources and using it to build a coherent justification for themes” (Creswell, 2009, p.191). This triangulation strategy is inherent to the phenomenological lens of the study. Each of the essential themes discussed were found to be noteworthy because they
were integral in some way to all eight individual stories and points of view. As a result, these emergent themes are validated by triangulation.

**Member Checking.** Member checking involves returning the report or thematic analysis of the data to the participants in order to validate the accuracy of the findings (Creswell, 2009). My method used member checking at three moments during data collection and analysis. Initial transcripts were emailed to participants so they could verify that the transcriptions are accurate to the interview which took place. After the verified transcripts were coded and clustered, the thematic analysis was once again shared with all of the participants. After these findings were “verified”, essential themes and patterns were identified from the code clusters. After a rich description of the essence of the event was documented, this too was shared with the participants for verification. The process of returning findings to the participants for verification has left little room for biased interpretation or skewing of the data.

**Bias Clarification: Bracketing.** Bracketing serves to clarify bias for two purposes in this study. First, identifying my own biases assisted with steering clear of a predisposed focus during data collection and analysis. Second, describing my own position with regards to purpose within student affairs helps the reader “consider the source” when engaging this study. In order to accomplish these two goals a peer assisted me with a bracketing interview (i.e. Kimmel & Crawford, 2000). Themes from this interview were reviewed prior to each interview or round of data analysis and coding to help me “suspend any preconceptions or learned feelings…about the phenomenon” (Johnson & Christensen, 2008, p.396).

**Outside Perspective: Debriefing and Auditing.** Creswell (2009) describes both peer debriefing and use of an external auditor as methods that add validity to a qualitative study. Peer
debriefing assists with overall study quality and relevance to people beyond the researcher whereas external auditing is a more formal assessment of the project from a methodological and procedural perspective. In order to help validate this study, one peer reviewer and one external auditor, who were unfamiliar with the study as well as a one seasoned methodologist familiar with the study, examined data collection and analysis methods.

**Delimitations**

The delimitations of this study are represented by the criterion required for participation in the study. This study observed only individuals who are either 1) actively engaged in a master’s degree in higher education administration, college student personnel, or a related field, or 2) are in the first three years of an entry level student affairs position. The group of participants comprised of eight individuals selected from the higher education administration master’s program and the division including Student Life at my own research focused large land-grant institution.

**Limitations**

As a result of the phenomenological lens employed during this study, the research itself is limited to the lived experiences of the participants. While any identification of shared experience might be used as a point of departure for other studies, programs, or policies, the findings themselves should not be considered generalizable to all emerging professionals. Telescoping and memory fade are additional concerns when asking participants to remember instances from the past. Telescoping has to do with a participant’s potential inability to accurately associate past events with the actual periods of time in which they occurred. Memory fade is the tendency for people to inaccurately remember events or details surrounding events.
Because telescoping and memory fade were impossible to check, I was unable to control for such limitations.
CHAPTER IV: PARTICIPANT STORIES

There were eight participants in this study who were all either serving as entry level professionals or pursuing a Master’s degree in higher education administration. All of the individuals who participated in this study did so willingly, and actively assisted data analysis by confirming researcher-identified coding. Below I will briefly narrate the stories of each participant’s journey to and through student affairs to the point of their interview. Pseudonyms and vague descriptions are used when necessary to ensure the privacy of the participants. A deeper analysis of transition and emergent themes follows in chapters 5 and 6.

Kelly

Kelly described herself as a white female Master’s student from the American Northeast in the first year of her graduate studies. Kelly entered undergraduate study at a state university in the American Northeast “kind of blankly”. She was interested in psychology and was a self-proclaimed “jock” in high school. During the early portion of Kelly’s undergraduate studies she enrolled in an entry level sociology course. The material in this introductory sociology course, as well as the significantly increased diversity of the college population compared to that of her hometown, exposed Kelly to “a whole new world” that she sought to engage frequently. Kelly said that she “loved the university environment” and knew she wanted to remain connected to such an environment eventually.

As Kelly’s undergraduate years came and went, she remained interested in the college environment, but had no plans for how to proceed with her development. Kelly said “when I was a senior I was like…‘I don’t know what I’m going to do, with this sociology degree. I’m not done with school yet…I don’t want to leave, I don’t want to work’”. It was during this time
of indecision that Kelly’s sister, who had come in to contact with student affairs professionals at a public university on the American West Coast, suggested the field of student affairs to Kelly. Recounting what her sister told her, Kelly said “There was this program (called) student affairs and they are just like these people who are always running around campus…they’re just like awesome cool people who love college”. Kelly decided that her sister’s description of the field of student affairs matched Kelly’s desire to engage college students and the university environment as a career.

Kelly applied to several schools in the Midwest and Southeast and ultimately decided to attend graduate school at a public institution in the southeast pursuing a master’s degree in higher education administration. At the time of the interview Kelly was finishing up her first year of graduate school and had developed a more complex view of the university. Furthermore, Kelly acknowledged a disconnection between the expectations of her assistantship in an office within student life and the foundational discussions that she engages in class. Kelly hoped to maintain high student contact throughout her career and articulated student impact as her primary reason for entering and remaining in the field of student affairs.

**Jacob**

Jacob described himself as a multiracial male participant who is in the second year of professional service in a department within the Division of Student Life and Enrollment. Jacob was from a city in the Deep South, but moved all over the nation because his father was in the military. Jacob spent time in the Pacific, Northeast, and Southeast during his formative years. Jacob attended a state school in the state of his birth on a mechanical engineering scholarship.
Almost immediately after enrolling in a theme based living-learning community, Jacob found a connection to the community that far exceeded his interest in engineering.

Jacob was particularly influenced by a mentor about which he stated “Sitting in class and hearing what (Jacob’s mentor) did after that first day I was like, ‘I want your job.’ At that point I slowly started losing interest in engineering”. After this pivotal moment, Jacob experimented with several focuses of study, but ultimately settled on a new major that connected directly to the themed housing which he had become so connected to. After changing his major, Jacob became active in conferences and involvement opportunities related to his newly chosen field and determined graduate school in student affairs was the next step.

Jacob applied and was admitted to another state school in the same state as his undergraduate degree. Though his area of focus was not expressly student affairs administration, it was a degree in administration directly related to his passion area (the central focus of the themed housing from his undergraduate degree). Jacob graduated with his master’s degree and gained employment at another Southeastern college located four states away from his home state. Since becoming a professional, Jacob has begun to connect his department’s mission to that of a greater field of student affairs. This connection has coincided with Jacob’s discovery of personal purpose. Jacob intended to branch out from his department in the future and serve as an administrator with the expressed goal to unify fragmented college curriculum toward holistic goals for educating engaged citizens.

**Kaiden**

Kaiden described himself as a white male who remained in his home state throughout his entire educational experience. In fact, Kaiden was a third-year professional in the same
institution where he received his undergraduate and graduate degrees. Starting out, Kaiden chose a major that he ultimately was unhappy with because of disconnects regarding passion and commitment to the related field. While Kaiden changed his major, the decision to do so was based on general interest rather than a passion towards the new focus of study. Kaiden’s passion was discovered outside the classroom through involvement in a popular student organization.

Through student involvement, Kaiden became interested in leadership development and changed his major to psychology. Kaiden was ultimately elected president of his organization and through the experience of executive leadership became interested in student affairs. It was common to see Kaiden taking home books on student development theory or foundations of leadership during his final years of undergraduate study. Furthermore Kaiden discussed the possibility of working within student affairs with several mentors and professionals in the field.

Upon graduating with a bachelor’s degree in psychology, Kaiden was faced with the option of going to work in a field for which he had no passion or seeking a degree in higher education administration. Kaiden chose to remain at his undergraduate institution and pursue a master’s degree in higher education administration. In the middle of his time as a graduate student Kaiden was able to forgo a second year of assistantship and enter directly into a professional role in Student Life. It was during Kaiden’s time as a graduate student and professional that everything started to click for him. Kaiden shared “having hands on experience of being an instructor, being a practitioner, (and) having some professional development opportunities…all of the sudden things just started to fall into place”.

Kaiden was one of two participants who most strongly identified a clear sense of purpose. Kaiden is powerfully committed to creating leaders in college who acknowledge leadership as contribution and impact as opposed to wielding titles and power. Kaiden directly connects
principles of leadership in every decision he makes and indicates that he does not share his peers’
desire of upward mobility. Kaiden said “I don’t really conceptualize (success) in terms of
position or hierarchy…I don’t care if I go down to coordinator, I don’t care if I go up to
director”. Kaiden said the moments he was most proud of were when he was part of helping a
student develop and see a bigger picture.

Ashley

Ashley described herself as a white female participant who grew up in the college town
where she would end up completing a bachelor’s degree in psychology and a master’s degree in
Public Administration. Ashley described the choices regarding program of study in both
undergraduate and graduate study as an “eenie, meenie miney, mo type choice”. In other words,
Ashley explains that her initial academic decisions were less focused and directed than some of
her fellow participants.

Ashley described the expectations that her family had for a college graduate were geared
towards employment in a trade. She went on to say that when you are raised in a family where a
professional trade is the expectation, professions outside that schema are difficult to imagine.
Ashley began her college career as a microbiology major because “her brother, who is now a
doctor, said…pharmaceutical sales were a fantastic career for (her)”, but quickly changed her
major to psychology as her interest and success in her original program of study waned. Ashley
described the subject matter in psychology “clicking” because “she loved people” and “loved
learning about people and about how they ticked”. Ashley said “the classes (she) took, (she)
took because (she) liked them; not because they were suitable for a career”.

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In addition to Ashley’s preferred coursework in psychology, she also engaged in coursework towards a minor in business administration. Ashley indicated that this minor coursework was more directed at obtaining employment in a trade. This connection to administration led Ashley to go on to consider master’s degrees in both business and public administration. Ultimately, Ashley chose a master’s in public administration (MPA) because she said it was “flexible and two of (her colleagues) were in the MPA program”. Ashley went on to say that the MPA program was “the best thing that could have happened to (her) because it was much more aligned with her intention of pursuing (a career) in higher education”.

Ashley was involved as a student employee during undergraduate work and continued to work in student affairs as part of a graduate assistantship throughout her master’s degree. Through a class project in graduate school, Ashley conducted interviews of professionals in the division where she was employed. During these interviews she discovered a career path in student affairs that matched her desire to impact students in an individual manner. Ashley is now a third year professional in her chosen career path and articulates a personal desire to keep her options open with regards to career advancement. Ashley said “I’m not quite sure what my next step is, but I would like for it to be in higher education and…student affairs. However, at this point it doesn’t necessarily have to be.” She articulates an open sense of career goals saying “(her) stipulations for her career…are however (she) can best assist students”.

Jeff

Jeff described himself as an African-American male in the second year of his master’s degree in higher education administration. Jeff attended a predominantly black public high school in a rural area approximately 4 hours away from the public state school where he received
a bachelor’s degree in political science and remained to continue in the higher education administration program.

Jeff entered college and immediately felt underprepared. Jeff said “I don’t feel like my high school prepared me for (college) at all…If you had seen me freshman year, you would have been like, ‘man this kid isn’t going to make it’. Jeff marked this experience as extremely powerful for him. Jeff told me that he would not have survived his first year were it not for a mentor in the African American Cultural Center. He went on to say that the programs and student groups associated with the center also assisted him in countless ways.

Jeff eventually branched out to other organizations, particularly various student media outlets, and became involved with divisional and even national leadership opportunities through student affairs conferences. While Jeff was serving in a peer mentor role for incoming freshman, the senior student affairs officer at his institution encouraged him to pursue a career in student affairs. Jeff told me his thoughts on the invitation were “student affairs? What the heck is that?”.

A combination of mentorship, involvement, and encouragement led Jeff to pursue a master’s degree in higher education. However, while the field of student affairs is a passion area for Jeff, he defines his true purpose as assisting minority students to prepare for the rigors of higher education. To that end, Jeff stated “I kind of feel like I’m probably not going to stay in student affairs…a keynote speaker…talked about the importance of helping the kids actually get to college. I’m thinking I might end up in secondary education”.  

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Miranda

Miranda described herself as an African American female in the second year of a career in student affairs. Miranda comes from the American Southwest and attended undergraduate study in the Southwest before coming to the Southeast for graduate study and professional placement at two separate institutions.

Miranda began her college career with a focus on journalism with hopes of one day being on television. This desire was connected to her hope to emulate several contemporary television personalities at the time. After recognizing some of the requirements of a focus in journalism, Miranda began to lose connection to the journalism program saying “I realized I would have to do a lot of writing and...be in front of the camera practicing. And that freaked me out. I don’t know what I was thinking, but I quickly changed my major.” After brief connections to education and psychology majors, Miranda found passion for a major in Human and Family Development. Miranda suggested her passion for the field of study came from fond memories of the subject matter in high school.

During her undergraduate studies, Miranda also served in a student academic coach position. She stated that in the position she had “a weekly meeting with the same students” to assist them with their academic development. Miranda enjoyed the position so much that she requested to stay on after graduation. Her supervisor informed her that the position was for students only and suggested the field of student affairs would be a more appropriate way to engage similar jobs.

Miranda proceeded through graduate school and found a position in student affairs. Miranda has a strong disposition towards being the best at whatever she does, but is negotiating what role she seeks to attain. Miranda said “I wanted to be the president of a university. It
definitely is not going to happen”. Miranda has aspirations of mid-management or even faculty positions and her goals generally revolve around increasing accessibility to higher education and careers for minority students.

James

James described himself as a white male in the first year of professional service. James was born and raised on the West Coast and left home to pursue a degree in international politics in the Midwest. After graduating with his bachelor’s degree he moved to a different West Coast state for graduate study and ultimately settled in the Deep South for his career placement.

Though James was connected to student affairs though student leadership and a graduate assistantship, he still decided to make student affairs a career focus later than most of the other participants. James articulated two reasons for this. First, James said “I was very absolute…I was using my graduate assistantship in (student affairs) as a means to get a master’s degree in political policy…to go into national defense, diplomacy, (or) political counseling”. Additionally James indicated that “(he) knew there was a career in student affairs, but (he) always looked down on it…felt he was above it”.

Midway through his graduate degree, James “forgot about a career in International Affairs (and)…started a shift teaching student affairs”. James stated that he really had to follow his passions, a purpose which he articulated as “(a) desire to make an impact and to somehow…impact as many students at…a personal level”. James ultimately views many connections to student affairs goals through the lens of his own department, but intends to break out of the department and get other perspectives so as to more effectively impact students.
Karen

Karen described herself as an African American female in her first year of graduate study in a higher education administration. Karen was born and raised in a small town in the Southeast and attended a local state college. She began her college career as a pre-pharmacy major and struggled to adjust to the rigor of her coursework. Afterwards Karen switched to a degree in hospital management because friends and family suggested this was a stable, well-paying career. After a few classes in her new major Karen decided she hated it and would have to find fulfillment outside of the classroom.

Karen got involved with numerous clubs, sports and activities and discovered student affairs through the people she came in contact with. Karen was also struck by tragedy as her brother was killed during her college career. Karen said this experience made her recognize that she needed to live for each day and be happy. Karen acknowledged that she had a very limited view of the field of student affairs, but it was a field that made her happy. When speaking of finding a role in student affairs Karen said, “I guess (I’m) not trying to conform too soon and (I want) to be able to just find an area that suits me. I don’t want to pick it, I want it to pick me.”

Review of Participants

These short narratives surrounding the stories of the participants are meant to acquaint the reader with the individuals who participated in this study. These biographical sketches do not fully convey the nuance, contradictions, deep struggles, and rewarding moments inherent to each participant, but rather summarize the spirit of each story. Chapter five will focus on the commonalities of structure surrounding transitions and the discovery of purpose among these participants. Table 4.1 below serves to review the backgrounds of the participants.
### Table 4.1
Summary of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Demographics</th>
<th>Undergraduate and Graduate Schools</th>
<th>Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kelly</td>
<td>White, Female from Northeast</td>
<td>Northeast, Southeast</td>
<td>1 yr. Grd.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacob</td>
<td>Multiracial, Male from many locations</td>
<td>Different Southeast</td>
<td>2 yr. Pro.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaiden</td>
<td>White, Male from Southeast</td>
<td>Same Southeast</td>
<td>3 yr. Pro.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashley</td>
<td>White, Female, from Southeast</td>
<td>Same Southeast</td>
<td>3 yr. Pro.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeff</td>
<td>African American male, from Southeast</td>
<td>Same Southeast</td>
<td>2 yr. Grd.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miranda</td>
<td>African American Female, from Southwest</td>
<td>Southwest, Southeast</td>
<td>2 yr. Pro.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>White, Male from West Coast</td>
<td>Midwest, West Coast</td>
<td>1 yr. Pro.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>African American Female, from Southeast</td>
<td>Different Southeast</td>
<td>1 yr. Grd.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER V – FINDINGS: PARTICIPANT TRANSITIONS

The guiding research question for this study was “what is the lived experience of discovery of purpose in student affairs among emerging professionals?” However, rich and thick descriptions are important to help understand the holistic picture of participant stories (Creswell, 1998). As part of this holistic picture, descriptions of shared notions of transition are important not only because they connect to the phenomenological methodological lens, but also the theoretical frame surrounding transition theory. Here, the shared experiences surrounding transition will be capitulated to better prime the reader to understand essential thematic material.

Participants in the study generally articulated moments along their journey wherein they specifically stopped to make meaning of their position in life and engage in choices about their next step. It is not surprising that these moments seem to occur in the months surrounding graduation from one educational institution and commencement into another or the profession of student affairs because participant stories are so connected to their higher education journeys. Transition theory (Evans et al., 1998; Schlossberg et al., 1995) suggests these life changes represent events about which participants struggle to make meaning of their place within their own changing world. The essence of this theme has to do with participant conceptualizations of purpose and the related meaning-making and decision-making processes during one of three transitional periods including: the transition to college, the transition to graduate study and assistantship, and the transition to professional service in student affairs.

The Transition to College

Generally speaking, the transition to college was characterized by the choices surrounding the bachelor’s program of study. Chief among these decisions were choice of
institution and major. Many participants described these choices as being some of the most straight-forward and directed in their journey. However, as the stories progressed in connection with the emergent operationalized definition of purpose, many participants demonstrated that these choices were the least purposeful within their respective journeys. This lack of purpose was apparent in participant narratives as participants generally described a quick loss of interest in their initial program of study followed by a migration to other things. New interests generally included a shift to a major more closely related to engaging human experience, involvement with student groups or employment, or both. This transitional period tends to extend well into undergraduate study in participant stories and concludes as participants begin thinking about graduate programs of study.

Decisions Regarding Institution and Program of Study. The experience of coming into college was different for each of the participants. Some entered college with plans that were not solidified. Kelly said, “I went into under-grad kind of very blankly. So I went in, I think, as like an exercise psychology major or something…I really like psychology but I’m kind of a jock so maybe this will be cool.” In Jacob’s case a scholarship determined his decision of institution and major. Jacob said, “The reason I was going to (my undergraduate institution) was because I was actually on a scholarship for mechanical engineering.” However, Jacob suggested that part of the decision was due to a lack of better options saying “so really just the inclination that I really don’t know what else to do at this point and I’m kind of good at (mechanical engineering) so let’s keep going with it. Both Kelly and Jacob describe intrinsic interest and prior success with subject matter as being primary contributing factors in the decision making process during the transition to college.
Ashley and Miranda also chose undergraduate degree programs based on interest, but they articulated the interest as being inspired from an external source. For Ashley, family expectations were impactful. Ashley suggested:

“I feel like I’m from a very technical background. My father was a chemical engineer and my brother’s an engineer, another brother is a doctor, and another one’s an electrician. So it was very uncommon that you would do something that wasn’t necessarily a trade. My mother was a homemaker and she had several different skills but I mean that was essentially her profession. And so when you’re surrounded by people that don’t necessarily have any other types of careers it’s hard for you to see beyond that.”

She went on to say that “(her) father had always told (her) that he could see (her) doing sales because (she had) such a passion for people.” Ultimately Ashley declared a major in science because her brother, who is now a doctor, told her “pharmaceutical sales” was a fantastic career.

Miranda was inspired to be a journalist by television personalities. Miranda said:

“I went to (my undergraduate institution) because they had the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism, math, communication and all of that. They’re known for that. And I wanted to be on TV. I knew that there was a show and the hosts were AJ and Free. This was a new show at the time and I was determined to be the next Walter Cronkite.”

A distinction was made between stories like those of Kelly and Jacob and stories like those of Ashley and Miranda because the former group seems more intrinsically motivated where the latter draws on external sources for motivation.

The remaining participants all connected their choices for undergraduate study to career after college. Careers in medicine seemed to be of particular interest to Kaiden and Karen who began as biology and pharmacy majors respectively. James described his decision saying:

“I entered college very focused on a career in international affairs politics. I think I started as an international affairs major and switched to (political science) and they’re very similar… my goal was to go into something like national defense, diplomacy, political consulting, something like that.”

Jeff also entered into a degree in political science with an even loftier goal:
“My major was political science. I wanted to be the first black president of America, but Obama beat me to that. After I came to college (I decided) I (had) to figure out what else I (was) going to do.”

Reviewing the stories of individuals who articulated decision making based on future career goals was interesting because such goals seem to be purpose-driven. However, none of these participants articulated a resolute plan for impact within these fields. In other words, participants articulated interest in a field, but not a purpose within the field.

The distinction between interest and purpose seems nuanced at first, but the difference lies in the presence of goal oriented action or a lack thereof. For example, James noted several possible applications for the degree in which he was interested, but was not able to articulate a specific goal. In James’ assertion we see a profound interest in international affairs, but no resolute purpose to see him through. Later in his story, James would indicate his interest in international affairs waned and was eventually abandoned highlighting the tendency for interest-based meaning making to lack purpose.

**Shifting Interests and Changing Majors.** The distinction between purpose and interest in degree programs or life aspirations is important to the focus of this study. During the transition to college, none of the participants exhibited purpose as defined by the study’s operational definition. In fact, the interest-driven decisions of participants during the transition to college proved fleeting as six of the eight participants changed their major and made significant shifts from their original program of study.

For many of the participants a change in major stemmed from waning success or loss of interest in their original program of study. Kaiden said:

“I started out as a biology major and I went through a semester of that and half way through another semester before I remember really looking at my degree audit and being like, ‘That’s a lot of labs. I don’t think I want to do this.’ So I switched and I was
undecided for a while. And then probably towards the end of my sophomore year I became a psychology major. And then liked those classes and enjoyed them a great deal”.

Ashley indicated a similar experience stating:

“I did well in high school essentially or, you know, well to my standards and did terrible freshmen year my first semester (of college in a biology major). But I took a psychology course and psychology clicked. So I decided to change my major from that first semester and that second semester ended up getting an entire point higher on my GPA than I did the semester before just because it started to make sense.”

For Karen, her switch from a degree in pharmacy was comparable to Kaiden and Ashley’s movement away from biology. Karen said “I was in the pharmacy program…and of course, you take a course in biology and you’d be like, ‘Oh, no’…It was not that I didn’t like it; I just wasn’t good at it.” Karen described a series of changes in programs of study within healthcare including heath studies and healthcare management because family recommended careers in those fields. Similar experiences were described outside of the medical fields as well. Miranda changed her major early as well when speaking of the journalism major saying “(I) realized that I would have to do a lot of writing and then I would actually have to be in front of the camera practicing. And that freaked me out.” Miranda went on to clarify her thoughts acknowledging “I don’t know what I was thinking, but I quickly changed my major.”

Not all changes in major were described as a primary result of waning success or loss of interest. In the stories of Jacob and Kelly, the change in program of study was more related to finding other interests which surpassed their original concentrations. For Jacob this experience happened outside the classroom. Jacob explained: “I signed up to be in the (themed) residence hall” and after meeting some of the staff who worked with the program Jacob said, “hearing what he did after that first day I was like, ‘I want your job.’ At that point I slowly started losing interest in engineering.” For Kelly, her shift in focus was a result of several aspects of coursework and student life. Kelly described these experiences saying:
“One of the very first semesters I had sociology 101. Loved it, fell in love. Being from a small town … it was like a bubble. I was stuck in a tiny little bubble. And sociology kind of was like wow, there’s a whole world out there and I want to learn all about it…I knew that’s what I wanted to do so I eventually. I knew right away. So I started taking sociology classes.”

Shifts in focus like those of Jacob and Kelly represent closer connections to the meaning making structures which connect to the study’s operational definition of purpose.

**Early Connections to Student Affairs.** While most participants described changes occurring with regards to direction inside the classroom, some also articulated a growing connection to student affairs outside the classroom. For Jeff and James, these changes represented most of the transition to college because they were able to connect or justify their development and passion with their degrees in political science. Jeff’s connection to student affairs was initially through contact with a mentor, whom Jeff describes as an agent which prevented him from failing in college. Jeff’s mentor got Jeff connected with a number of student groups and organizations with missions surrounding helping minority students succeed in the university. Jeff said “I was involved in the MLK Committee, the Black Student Union, Black History Month Committee, pretty much all of the organizations that dealt with black people and had black students.” Jeff felt that his political science background and experience is student affairs related because “everything in this world is politics…that’s one reason why I studied political science because I figured if I could master political science, I could master almost everything in this world” James also connected to student affairs early, but thought of his connection to student affairs as extra-curricular despite his passionate connection to the field. James said “I was in my freshman year of college and needed a job” James found employment “in the work study program (in student affairs)…I progressed to manager (and) just got more and more involved in (student affairs) at (my institution).” Miranda and Jacob also found connections
to student affairs though student employment although their journey through the transition to college was more focused on changes in major than shifts outside the classroom.

Kaiden and Karen, to the contrary, articulated that their most meaningful experiences were outside the classroom. Kaiden, after describing being very involved with a representational student group on campus shared:

“I started to see this wider shape of an institution take place. And it really started to make me curious and started to fascinate me. And as people would bring forward research on the effects of (various campus issues), I started to get a sense (that) there’s a whole lot more that goes on here than I am aware of.”

Karen articulated her experience outside the classroom from the perspective of seeking fulfillment that she could not attain in the classroom. Karen said “The classes weren’t interesting…so I would have to find a place outside of the classroom…I joined Civic Government Association, I was a cheerleader, I was an ambassador…I literally did everything.

For these participants the university context outside of the classroom was every bit as influential, if not more so, than the classroom experience.

**The Transition to Graduate Study and Assistantship.** Participant stories explicated three major transitional periods. The first transitional period – The Transition to College – comes to a close just as the second – The Transition to Graduate Study and Assistantship – begins. At the outset of this period, participant stories demonstrate the greatest array of responses ranging from having no knowledge of the field of student affairs (despite having been active agents in the field) all the way to being deeply passionate about the field and seeking to join. Kelly, for instance, came to the end of her college career much as she had in her high school career and had no true plans for the future. When told about student affairs by her sister she said “Oh, okay, I’ll look into it…I love students, I love this group, I want to work with this
age group.” For Jeff, after being similarly addressed by mentors in student affairs, he was surprised by the opportunity saying “student affairs, what the heck is that? I never heard of that.” Others like Kaiden and Jacob actively sought to join the field and learn as much as they could while the remaining participants had knowledge of the field, but never really considered joining until asked.

Once in graduate programs and assistantships, participants agreed they gained a more complex and sometimes disjointed view of the field. Some participants like Kaiden began truly connecting to the material through work and study. Kaiden said:

“And then in that final semester I was taking an assessment course, I was taking a strategic planning course. I was teaching in my role there and at this time I was a full time professional. And so kind of really having hands on experience of being an instructor, being a practitioner, having some professional development opportunities like going to the national, national conference, all of a sudden things just started to fall into place.”

Miranda, on the other hand, voiced a disconnection between coursework and practice saying:

“in your graduate program, we talk about all these big picture ideas of how you develop a student and how you challenge and support, all these different theories and just big picture things but then when you actually put it into practice, you don’t see those things.”

Choices during this transitional period are heavily connected to essential themes. Thus quotations and data will be exhaustively discussed in the following chapter.

**The Transition to Professional Service in Student Affairs.** Participant stories corroborate that the final transitional period occurs as one begins making decisions regarding moving from graduate study to professional career. Because Kelly and Karen were still early in their graduate degrees, they did not articulate any connection to this transitional period. The remaining participants, including Jeff who was finishing his master’s degree in student affairs administration at the time, articulated this transitional period as having connection to their
positionality as professionals. Participants discussed a number of realizations that came with professional service including the discovery that upward mobility – an expressed desire by many – meant losing direct impact on students. Miranda, struggling with the reality that she had responsibility for 400 students, stated:

“I feel like my role is to kind of open those glass ceilings so maybe put minority students or marginalized students in a position to reach their goals… I don’t really feel like I’m really serving that purpose because I have (so many) people I would like to do that with.”

Ashley, in similar regards, negotiated the issue by referring to mentors who attempt to maintain student contact despite having moved up in the field. Ashley articulated this by suggesting that she has to balance personal needs and the job explaining:

I’ve tossed (the notion of losing student contact) out before with our director and with our associate director and they both have a very similar mindset of they make it a point not to lose that mentoring capacity. And sometimes I think it makes their days a little bit bogged down because of it. A little bit busier than probably they would like for it to be but, you know while I might be seeing students less and less I think that I still would like to meet with students. But I also know that as I grow within my career and I have a certain skill set that maybe my skill set is best utilized being in that type of position so I’m not necessarily fulfilling my personal need.

Similar to the second transition period, participant responses regarding the Transition to Professional Service in student affairs are highly interrelated to essential themes and will be heavily discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 5 has discussed the underlying structure present in participant stories surrounding transitional issues. It is important for the reader to understand the importance of the transitional periods in and through undergraduate study, graduate study, and professional experiences in order to recognize the importance of the emergent themes. Emergent themes in the study center on meaning-making and decision-making in response to the transitional periods that have been highlighted here. In chapter 6 emergent themes will be discussed.
CHAPTER VI – FINDINGS: ESSENTIAL THEMES

This inquiry was designed to shed light on emerging professionals’ lived experience of discovering purpose within student affairs. The phenomenological lens of the study lends itself to better understanding those who actually experience the events and non-events surrounding discovery of purpose or the lack thereof in student affairs. Purposeful sampling and a willing participant pool ultimately produced eight stories which were sufficient to triangulate and horizontalize an essential underlying structure of meaning (Colaizzi, 1978; Creswell, 2002).

Essential Themes Surrounding Discovery of Purpose

All eight participants were interviewed with a protocol which was based on the primary research question “how do emerging student affairs professionals experience discovering purpose within student affairs?” Participant descriptions regarding discovery of purpose were also closely connected to elements within the theoretical frames of self-authorship and transition theory. Essential themes were identified using an increasingly sophisticated regimen of coding strategies which relied on horizontalization and clustering. Horizontalization was accomplished by identifying significant statements in interview transcripts regarding purpose, self-authorship, and transitional periods. Similar or related significant statements were then clustered and eventually three interrelated essential themes became clear.

1. Conceptualization of the field of student affairs becomes more complicated through each transitional period.
2. Discovery of purpose occurs late; often in the third transitional period.
3. The manner by which one is called to the field of student affairs is important to discovery of purpose.
Theme 1: Conceptualization of the Field of Student Affairs Becomes More Complicated Through Each Transitional Period. The first prevailing essential theme was closely connected to the second and had to do with the manners by which participants’ understanding of the field of student affairs affected their meaning-making and decision-making processes. As such, there are three conceptual stages that most participants encountered regarding concepts of student affairs as undergraduates, graduate students, and new professionals. Navigating these transitions was compounded by the fact that participants across the pool acknowledged they were unable to speak with family or friends about transitional issues because these people were unable to understand the overarching mission of student affairs. Without the benefit of such a significant support structure, peers became the major source of support.

Undergraduate Concepts of Student Affairs. When telling the story of their undergraduate experiences, participants articulated rudimentary or non-existent conceptualizations of the student affairs field. Some participants suggested they had no idea the profession existed. Others said that during their undergraduate study, they viewed the field as an occupation wherein professionals had a great deal of fun while remaining in the college environment and helping college students. A few participants articulated that they recognized the administrative duties that came with the professional as well. This latter minority of participants suggested that concepts of administration within student affairs were discovered by seeking information about the field rather than passive observation. Here, undergraduate concepts of student affairs will be discussed using participant interview data.

Several participants suggested that they never considered student affairs or even recognized the existence of the field until later in their experiences. Ashley said she studied
concepts parallel to the field’s foundations and worked within student affairs offices. Looking back at her story, Ashley indicated that student affairs and higher education administration were not a primary area of focus. She said, “I wasn’t familiar with the higher ed program until I was already in my first year (of graduate school) and I took some classes that some other higher ed students were taking.” As has been mentioned for Jeff, the invitation to join the field caught him off guard because he did not even realize the field existed.

Another common undergraduate understanding of student affairs among participants centered on the notion that the career was a fun, exciting vocation and/or that the job allowed one to stay engaged with college students in order to help them succeed. Kelly - imitating advice she received about the field - exhibited such a belief when she said, “(student affairs professionals) are just like these people who are always running around campus and you couldn’t ever find them because they were just like so active and, you know, they’re just like awesome, cool people who love college.” Miranda said “I started to realize that because I was in a lot of clubs and organizations and the advisors and the people who helped us fill out paperwork, those people were actually working. They weren’t just volunteering their time.” In this quotation and surrounding statements Miranda connotes that up until this point she either had not given much thought to the profession or assumed that the professionals with whom she had been engaged were akin to unpaid helpers. For Karen, the interpretation that student affairs was a fun vocation comes from her own experience. Discussing her time as an actively involved student, both in organizations and student employment Karen said “I was enjoying it so much it didn’t matter...so whatever I was doing, I was like, ‘Oh, where is this energy coming from; I had no idea but I love it’. Interest in a fun and exciting career where one was able to help students learn was appealing for many participants and ultimately drew them to the field.
The final manner by which participants engaged the field of student affairs as undergraduate students was by seeking information about the field. This was articulated by three of the eight participants. Kaiden – after developing a strong connection to student leadership through executive officer positions – recounted his interest in learning more about the field saying:

“I think that (the) light kind of clicked, that happens to so many future student affairs professionals. It’s like, okay, people are doing this as a job. So if they’re doing this as a job how do they get to this point? And so that’s when I started having conversations with people about, “Well what is it that you do? How do you get there?” And then I think that makes a student affairs professional’s day so I found myself taking home things like student development theory books and such like that.”

Jacob told a similar story in many ways, though rather than being attracted to an entire group of professionals, he connected closely with one individual. After sharing a story about engaging in student leadership and involvement related to his particular passion area within student affairs, Jacob said:

“After that I was like, “Okay, this is what I want to do. How can I get there? (His mentor’s) big thing was you know, there is not one path, you can go anyway you want to go and then started attending (conferences) in my junior and senior years...I got an internship…I figured out grad school was the next step.”

The stories of those that developed understanding of student affairs as undergraduates, however, were not all similar. While Kaiden and Jacob both told stories of finding passion for a specific segment in student affairs and reaching out to learn more and make their passion into a career, James had a different story altogether. For James, student affairs was something he enjoyed and recognized as a career for others, but believed he was destined for something more important. It was not until later in his development that James shifted his focus to a career in student affairs.

Five of the eight participants suggested they had truly limited understandings of the field of student affairs during their time as undergraduates. Even the three who developed more
complete recognition of the field during bachelor’s study, would come to say their conceptualizations were limited compared to the realities of the field. Despite having limited and/or incomplete concepts of the responsibilities within student affairs, six of the eight participants entered graduate study to become student affairs professionals. Ashley and James, the participants who pursued unrelated graduate degrees did so for different reasons. Ashley was still unaware of the field and James felt – at the time – that he was above the role of a student affairs practitioner. Regardless of all eight participants’ views on student affairs going into graduate studies, each of their concepts were altered moving forward.

**Graduate Concepts of Student Affairs.** Before engaging the concepts described by participants when recounting their time as graduate students, it is important to remind the reader of the positionality of the participants within the five-year emerging professional time span. Kelly, Karen, and Jeff were all in graduate school at the time of the study, though Jeff was about to graduate. The remaining participants were already in careers as professionals in student affairs. As a result of the lack of time spent in graduate school, Kelly and Karen had little to offer to the discussion and some of the professionals such as Miranda and Jacob did not articulate a great many graduate concepts separately from professional concepts. As a result, this portion of the thematic material relies primarily on the accounts of Kaiden, Ashley, Jeff, and James with supplementary support from the comments of Kelly, Karen, Jacob, and Miranda.

Each of the participants indicated their understanding of student affairs was impacted in graduate school. Both Kelly and Karen suggested that they recognized a far more complex system within student affairs based on conversations in class and within their daily work with their assistantships. Miranda and Jacob tended to blur stories regarding development of ideas
about the field between graduate and early professional time periods. Among the other participants, however, moments of profound development were articulated.

Jeff identified the manners by which his personal mission related to student affairs earlier in his story than the other participants. Since being in graduate school and connecting with the field through both his assistantship and national conferences, he saw the value and impact that the field can have. Jeff shared “it’s great to develop the kids once they get here and we definitely need (student affairs) professionals to help with development, but there are just not enough kids getting to higher education.” Though Jeff recognized the impact he might have on college students, he articulated his purpose with regards to helping minority students get into college. Jeff said that he planned to leave the field of student affairs in order to position himself in secondary education and pursue his purpose there.

Both Kaiden and Ashley described understanding of the field “clicking” through experiences inside and outside the graduate school classroom. Kaiden, when discussing the event said, “I think things started to kind of come together… all of a sudden things just started to fall into place.” For Ashley, a specific class project, in conjunction with speaking with seasoned professionals in the field, stemmed a synergistic connection to student affairs. Ashley recollected:

“And (a job in student affairs) to me really was comprised of all of the skills that I had of, you know, being able to work one on one with individuals. But in this capacity I could actually help students. And that was something that was missing. I loved working for the university, but I wanted to be able to be a mentor of sorts. I spoke with the vice-chancellor of, I believe it was called student affairs at the time, it was amazing to see how much student life is involved. And really, you know, helping the students to transition from high school to college and to help them to see where their place is just in life in general.”
These connections for Kaiden and Ashley were noted as a midpoint in their development, because they described more sophisticated connection to their own purpose and that of student affairs later in the interview.

James, perhaps, had one the most striking changes with respect to understanding the field of student affairs. James’ comments were so powerful because they represented a shift in values rather than understanding. Though James had been active with the same area within student affairs for his entire undergraduate career and the first year of his master’s coursework, he maintained that his involvement was simply a job to pay for his schooling towards a career in international politics. However, speaking of the midpoint in his graduate studies, James said:

“I just started to see higher education, see student affairs as a career was viable and was an option and really made sense to me…basically I forgot about a career in international affairs/political science…I really invested a lot more into…my graduate assistantship with intentions of either getting a job as a professional in (student affairs) or doing something like Teach for America or something along those lines. Ultimately as the year progressed I kept feeling better and better about my decision to go that route.”

James ultimately chose student affairs and moved on to develop a passion for holistic education within higher education.

The participants in the study described significant shifts in understanding and connection to the field of student affairs. Whether it was an initial recognition of the depth and breadth of the profession, a more directed connection to a participant’s personal passion, and simply the realization that student affairs was a field in which they were truly interested, graduate school altered participant perceptions of the field. However, participants articulated that the move into professional roles was equally powerful, if not more so.

**New Professional Concepts of Student Affairs.** Stories surrounding the call to student affairs in undergraduate study and the preparation to serve in professional roles are certainly
impactful, however, it is the experiences of the new professional that speak to the discovery of purpose which is at the core of what this study engages. Kelly, Jeff, and Karen were left out of this portion of the story because they had not yet reached the transition into their professional careers. The stories of the five participants who were serving as professionals highlighted some interesting connections. The central shared notion across each new professional’s story was career advancement. All five professional’s indicated upward mobility was important to them at some point in their professional journey, but each has engaged career advancement with different goals in mind. Notions of purpose, if engaged by participants at all, are brought forward here, because the professional transitional period sees participants share stories of hard choices and sacrifice.

James, Miranda, and Ashley all engaged their professional careers differently. Commonalities between their stories within the professional portion of the narrative centered on negotiating the complexities in student affairs as well as grappling with notions of upward mobility. Ashley suggested that she did not have a focused goal, but rather a passion towards helping students. She said, “I’m driven by my passion…and being very open minded… So hopefully that means I’ll…have a particular high level job somewhere along the lines…I think that this capacity is perfect for where I am in my career.” Ashley seemed hopeful that she would remain upwardly mobile, but did not seem to structure any expectations around career advancement. This was also inherent to the stories of James and Miranda. In Miranda’s case she specifically articulated her negotiations with the concept of upward mobility as a readjustment of goals with an emphasis on having a family and avoiding politics. James, on the other hand sought to move into whatever roles he felt he could continue educating students. All three individuals remarked sadness of losing student contact as one advanced in the career. James,
Miranda, and Ashley were unable to describe a clear sense of purpose and only James expressed a clear desire to remain in the field of student affairs.

Among the five professional participants, Jacob and Kaiden articulated the clearest sense of purpose in their interviews. Both offered an explanation of their purpose that held up to the operational definition of purpose within the study (a self-authored, determined and resolute focus within student affairs that is action oriented, intentional, and impactful). Here I will discuss the manners by which Jacob’s and Kaiden’s articulation met the criteria of the operational definition including being: (1) self-authored, (2) determined and resolute, and (3) action oriented, intentional and impactful. The manners by which Kaiden and Jacob engage upward mobility with regards to purpose will also be discussed.

Participant stories regarding the discovery of purpose acknowledge the manners by which individuals connect their own passions and desires with social influences and transitional demands. Kaiden found that expectations of his peer group were directly related to moving up in the field as quickly as possible. He shared, “I can remember going to a new professionals institute and hanging out with sixty other people who all wanted to be vice-presidents of student affairs.” Kaiden said he also shared this ideology of upward mobility for some time; however, during his early professional career he began to self-author a different perspective. He explained, “I feel like if I can be a part of helping influence a generation of people who can make something better than what’s already here and …what is to become. I think that for me is very purposeful and meaningful work”. Regarding this mission, Kaiden went on to explain where he felt his role was within the greater community saying:

“I realize that I’m not going to be that person. I’m never going to be the president or a senator or anything like that. I’m just not made for that. I don’t have the stomach for it, but almost every day I see someone … who I can see growing because of their potential to be someone who I would readily follow.”
Kaiden adhered to a sense of purpose with these statements that seemed self-authored because it truly connected his desires for the field with what he observed as the needs of the field. Jacob acknowledged a similar sense of purpose saying his mission surrounded “providing that basic motivation to change, but then also for them to be motivated to go out and continue to create change”. Jacob articulated his purpose around educating others towards lives of impact and service. Jacob described his connection to the greater community saying, “knowing how much I’ve changed over the past six years…really motivates and …teaches me to work towards that, whether that is (in my specific area) or…some other…area or whether that’s looking at dean of students or something like that.” In other words, Jacob described a purpose towards helping others find the life balance he found throughout his college development. Such a connection indicates a connection to self-authored concepts of purpose.

Both Kaiden and Jacob are determined and resolute in their purpose. Kaiden rejected the common-place notion of upward mobility in order to remain in a space that best supports in his mission. He shared:

“I can remember going to a new professionals institute and hanging out with sixty other people who all wanted to be vice-presidents of student affairs. But…the stuff that I love is that transformative element of those experiences… so I don’t care if I go down to a coordinator, I don’t care if I go up to a director. I think being in a place that’s going to allow me to advance as an educator is what’s most important.”

Jacob, while recognizing that his purpose could be connected to multiple roles in student affairs, was determined to continue his service in his chosen field he said:

“I definitely want to stay in (the field). I think there is a lot of good work that happens within (the field) especially with the different collaboration opportunities…I think there is a lot that we can offer each other …I definitely am a supporter of the co-curricular opportunities (in) student affairs and higher education as part of that holistic education. I definitely want to stay in student affairs and kind of start to getting that breadth of the different program areas”
Both participants also specified measurable impacts that they connected to purpose. Kaiden said that it would mean a great deal to him when he could help someone become the “type of person who want(ed) to do something bigger than just get a six figure job, settle down, start working towards retirement.” Jacob again connected his purpose more closely with his departmental mission saying, “My purpose is to really examine programs that we can offer specifically within (the field) and kind of see where those needs are with our students and to see what we can do to address those needs.”

The operational definition of purpose that emerged from the participant interviews can be connected most closely with the stories of Kaiden and Jacob. Other professional participants acknowledge passion and interest in the field, but did not share resolute, directed and/or self-authored descriptions. It should also be noted that no participants described any sort of resolute purpose until late in their journey as an emerging professional. This observation is continued in discussion on the second emergent theme.

**Theme 2: Discovery of purpose occurs late; often in the third transitional period.**
The second emergent essential theme is related to the first and based on the operationalized definition of purpose as being *a self-authored, determined and resolute focus within student affairs that is action oriented, intentional, and impactful*, only three participants articulated such purpose. Each of the individuals who articulated a clear sense of purpose (Jeff, Kaiden, and James) described themselves as being unable to do so until later in their journey. The remaining five participants make meaning of their connection to the field in less directed, but often powerful manners nonetheless. Here thematic material surrounding Purpose-Driven Rationale, Interest-Driven Rationale, and Functional Rationale will be discussed. Table 6.1 below illustrates each participant’s decision making throughout the transitional periods.
Table 6.1

Participant Decision Making

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Trans. to College</th>
<th>Trans. to Grad Sch.</th>
<th>Trans. To Pro</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kelly</td>
<td>Interest Based</td>
<td>Interest Based</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacob</td>
<td>Function/Interest Based</td>
<td>Interest Based</td>
<td>Interest/Purpose Based</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaiden</td>
<td>Function/Interest Based</td>
<td>Interest Based</td>
<td>Interest/Purpose Based</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashley</td>
<td>Function/Interest Based</td>
<td>Interest Based</td>
<td>Interest Based</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeff</td>
<td>Interest Based</td>
<td>Interest/Purpose Based</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miranda</td>
<td>Interest Based</td>
<td>Interest Based</td>
<td>Interest Based</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>Interest Based</td>
<td>Interest Based</td>
<td>Interest Based</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>Function/Interest Based</td>
<td>Interest Based</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Rationale Driven by Function or Interest. Emergent participant experiences from the interviews suggested that the vast majority of decisions leading up to and even during professional careers in student affairs lack a sense of purpose as defined by the operational definition. Specifically none of the eight participants articulated purpose-driven rationale during the transition to college and only one participant (Jeff) did so late in graduate school. Of the remaining seven participants, only two had begun to describe purposeful meaning-making and decision-making within their professional careers. After coding significant statements about each participant’s expressed rationale for decisions it was found that interest and/or function were primary meaning-making structures which contributed to participant decision-making.

Interest-driven rationale appeared often in participant stories; particularly in the transition to college and graduate school. An example of interest-driven meaning-making was seen when Ashley said, “I just know that I loved people; I loved learning about people and about how they ticked. So the classes that I took, I took because I liked them. Not particularly because they would be suitable for a career.” Other examples seem more closely related to purpose, but lack some of the components required by the operational definition. For instance, Kaiden said, “So I
decided just to go forward with (a psychology degree) knowing…that (it) deals with people and that’s what I knew that I wanted to do.” In Kaiden’s statement there exists some self-authored expression to engage with people in a career, but no resolute, action oriented plan to do so.

Interest-driven decisions were often quickly reversed or changed within participant stories. Miranda articulated a quick succession of interest-based changes during her undergraduate study. “And then I decided that I wanted to be a teacher so I changed my major to education…but that didn’t work out for me. I then changed to psychology and then finally to family development.” Miranda went on to say that each major change was based on a career aspiration she developed from seeking to emulate others. A common professional interest-driven thread between the individuals who did not articulate professional purpose was that they each described goals as a function of their departmental roles.

Function-driven rationale was a more reactive meaning-making phenomenon seen in participant interviews. It was described by participants when telling stories of logistical opportunities or obstacles along their journey. The biggest events that generally contributed to function-based decision-making were financial or academic. Financial opportunities generally manifested in narrative regarding financial aid. Jacob said “The reason I was going to (my undergraduate institution) was because I was actually on a scholarship for mechanical engineering”. Kaiden on the other hand discussed a financial obstacle with applying to an out of state graduate school saying “So I was looking at over $50,000 price tag for two semesters which didn’t sit well with me at all. And then so I kind of came back (to my undergraduate institution)”. Kaiden, Ashley, and Karen explained functional decisions based on academics when describing swift major changes away from biology as a result of declining success.
Decisions based on interest and function represented almost every decision making structure in participant narratives. While these decisions certainly had meaning and were often powerful forces in the development of the participants’ stories, they lacked components of purpose driven decisions. Interest-based decisions generally lacked a resolute action plan and function-based decisions emerged as coping mechanisms that always lacked self-authorship. Three of eight participants eventually came to purpose-driven decisions about their place in student affairs late in their narratives.

**Purpose-Driven Rationale.** Purpose-driven rationale was highly connected to the operational definition of purpose. The stories of Jeff, Kaiden, and Jacob discovering purpose have already been discussed. The acknowledgment that these individuals did discover a sense of purpose is of less import in this section that the recognition of *when*. All three participants discovered their own purpose late in their progression towards careers as student affairs professionals. Furthermore, the other five participants – three of whom are professionals – did not articulate finding a sense of purpose yet. A summary of each participant’s most recently articulated rationale for being in the field can be found in table 6.2 (see next page).

The main problem this study seeks to illuminate has to do with low satisfaction and high attrition rates among new professionals. Among the five individuals who did not articulate a sense of purpose, only one indicated a determined intent to remain in student affairs. This is particularly troubling when one acknowledges that throughout and across participant narratives, decisions made in the absence of purpose were changed or reversed frequently. Additionally, Jeff – upon discovering his purpose – recognized that his mission involved leaving student affairs. There seems to be the potential that any individual who has not yet discovered their purpose could feel the same as Jeff. The potential connection between discovery of purpose and
determination to remain in the field will be touched on in discussion of the third theme and heavily discussed in chapter seven.

**Table 6.2**

Participant Intent to Remain in Student Affairs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Latest Articulation of Rationale</th>
<th>Intent to Remain in Student Affairs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kelly</td>
<td>Interest Based (Grad)</td>
<td>Unsure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacob</td>
<td>Interest/Purpose Based (Pro)</td>
<td>Will Remain in Student Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaiden</td>
<td>Interest/Purpose Based (Pro)</td>
<td>Will Remain in Student Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashley</td>
<td>Interest Based (Pro)</td>
<td>Unsure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeff</td>
<td>Interest/Purpose Based (Grad)</td>
<td>Will Leave Student Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miranda</td>
<td>Interest Based (Pro)</td>
<td>Unsure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>Interest Based (Pro)</td>
<td>Will Remain in Student Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>Interest Based (Grad)</td>
<td>Unsure</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Theme 3: The manner by which one is called to the field of student affairs is important to discovery of purpose.** As discussed when describing Theme 2, not all emerging professionals describe coming to engage purpose-driven connections to the field. Participant-narrated stories of their own experiences in student affairs exhibit connections regarding the phenomena of discovering purpose that seem too congruent to dismiss as simple coincidence. Three types of “calls” to the field of student affairs were described within the group of participants including: The suggestion to pursue a career in student affairs from a source external to the field, the invitation to join the field from a student affairs professional, and the internal decision to seek joining the field by the participant. The type of call one received to the field seems related to participant meaning-making because all but one who were called by others (either by suggestion or invitation) articulated no clear purpose for remaining in the field, while those who sought to join student affairs themselves voice a committed intent to remaining in the field.
**External Calls to Student Affairs.** External calls to student affairs came in two fashions within participant stories. The first manner of call was a suggestion to join the field by someone external or ancillary to the field. The second, more prevalent, manner of call was an invitation to join the field from a professional within student affairs. Two participants (Kelly and Ashley) received external suggestions to the field. Four others (Kaiden, Jeff, Miranda, and James) were invited to join the field by a student affairs professional. The manners by which these calls were received were described as important to the manners by which goal-oriented decisions were made later in the narratives.

Kelly received a suggestion from her sister. Kelly recounted the moment saying, “My sister… told me about student affairs. She was like, ‘You know (what) I think would be really awesome for you?...There was this program at Oregon State, it was like student affairs’”. For Ashley the call to involvement with higher education was more abstract. While describing working in a department outside of student affairs she said, “essentially as an undergraduate student they said, ‘(they’d) like to keep (me) on as a graduate student if (I was) interested in going to graduate school.’” Continuing with the narrative, Ashley highlighted that “Even (her) choice of going to graduate school was an eeny, meeny, miny, moe type choice”. Based on participant experiences, suggestions to join the field from individuals external to student affairs included some of the least informed understandings of the profession within participant stories.

Kaiden, Jeff, Miranda, and James all received the call via invitation to join the field from a student affairs professional. Kaiden’s invitation came after he had already inquired heavily about becoming a student affairs professional, so his call will be discussed in more detail within the section on intrinsic calls to student affairs. Jeff and James were both very active student leaders who receive an unsolicited call to join the field. For Jeff this came from the senior
student affairs officer at his university. Jeff recalled, “I actually first met (the vice president) and he got me hooked up with the National Undergraduate Fellow Program through NASPA…he knew I was graduating…and he told me I should consider student affairs”. James experienced a similar call from professionals who said, “Hey you are really good (at what we do) and you are really good in this higher education setting and it actually is meaningful. There is a real career there.”

Miranda bears the need for special mention because her call was externally driven from a student affairs professional, but it was delivered in a different way. While Jeff and James had unsolicited calls based on excellent performance and Kaiden’s call was solicited via deep interest in the field, Miranda’s call was solicited unlike any other. Miranda explained, “I had an undergraduate position called an academic coach and I really liked that position… I asked my supervisor if I could stay after I graduated.” Miranda went on to say that her supervisor answered, “No it was just an undergraduate position, but how about you think about going into Student affairs?” Miranda’s story is different because she did not seek the field like Kaiden or receive an unsolicited invitation like James and Jeff. Instead she simply liked her student job and wanted to remain.

External calls to join student affairs, as described by participants, come from many places. Suggestions from outside sources seem directed at helping the student find their niche, whereas invitations seemed to indicate that the individual doing the inviting believed that the participant had a bright future in the field. Ultimately, participant stories capitulated that external calls seemed to have less connection to purpose and matriculation in the field than intrinsic calls.
**Intrinsic Calls to Student Affairs.** Three participants described a call to student affairs that was intrinsically motivated. Kaiden felt deep intrinsic motivation to join a particular area in student affairs and began seeking the manner by which he could join the field long before he was ever asked. Kaiden shared, “So if (student affairs practitioners are) doing this as a job, how do they get to this point?...I started having conversations with people about, ‘Well what is it that you do? How do you get there?’”. Kaiden went on to say that these conversations ultimately lead to the invitation to join from a director within student affairs. In contrast, Jacob said he never received an invitation to join student affairs. Instead he acknowledged that he was committed early to pursuing his interests in a particular department within student affairs. His story includes working with professionals in student affairs to gain experience and ultimately employment in the field of his passion.

Karen tells a story full of tragedy and hope. Her motivations to join the field were truly intrinsic and more connected to emotion than logical thought processes. After struggling to connect academic success to her field of interest (pharmacy and medicine), Karen said she was faced with the untimely death of her brother. Karen connected the tragic circumstances surrounding her brother’s death with deep personal desire to find a career that made her happy. Karen said, “I don’t know how long I’ll be here, but while I am here, I want to be here no matter how much they pay me…I’m really happy I made that decision.” While Karen’s rationale does not meet the operational definition of purpose, it is full of passion. Because of the extenuating circumstances involving a self-disclosed brush with mortality and the fact that Karen is very early in her graduate career; it is difficult to say how such events will affect her discovery of purpose.
Participant Calls and Purpose. Participant stories suggest that the manners by which one is called to the field seem to have a strong connection to a purpose surrounding remaining in the field of student affairs. Table 6.3 below shows that participants who actively sought out the field seem more likely to develop purpose within the field.

Table 6.3
Participant Calls and Purpose

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Type of Call</th>
<th>Articulated Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kelly</td>
<td>Suggestion from individual outside Student Affairs</td>
<td>Undefined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacob</td>
<td><strong>Request motivated by intrinsic desire</strong></td>
<td>Discovered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaiden</td>
<td><strong>Request motivated by intrinsic desire</strong> followed by Invitation from individual within Student Affairs</td>
<td>Discovered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashley</td>
<td>Suggestion from individual outside Student Affairs</td>
<td>Undefined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeff</td>
<td>Suggestion from individual outside Student Affairs</td>
<td>Undefined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miranda</td>
<td>Invitation from individual within Student Affairs</td>
<td>Undefined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>Invitation from individual within Student Affairs</td>
<td>Undefined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>Intrinsic Response to Personal Tragedy</td>
<td>Undefined</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notable Exceptions to Themes

Creswell (2009) suggests one means of strengthening the validity of a qualitative study is to report “negative or discrepant information”. Within the essential themes there were two notable exceptions that will be reported. Both exceptions had to do with the relationship between the call to join the field and intent to remain in the field. This relationship was characterized by two thematic connections: (1) an external invitation to the field corresponded to uncertainty regarding the intent to remain in student affairs or (2) the intrinsic desire to join the field corresponded with the commitment to stay in student affairs.
The first exception to essential themes was Karen’s relationship with the call to student affairs and her intent to remain in the field. As is the case with many qualitative data sets, some participant stories cannot be completely related to the underlying shared structure. Karen’s response to the death of her brother was to develop a practice of participating in activities that made her happy. Student involvement and employment was something that truly made Karen happy and, as a result, Karen described pursuing a career in student affairs as the next step. Though this interaction might be labeled as an intrinsic request to join the field, Karen’s telling of the story suggests that her motivations cannot be grouped together so simply. As a result, Karen’s experience could not be connected to Theme 3: The manner by which one is called to the field of student affairs is important to discovery of purpose in any way.

The second exception had to do with James’ invitation to the field. In the more common cases within the data, and invitation to student affairs came when a participant was struggling with the next step, excelling in their work within student affairs, or asked to join themselves. In each of these cases there seemed to be a connection between the manner of call and intent to remain in the field. James’ story is contrary to this pattern because he was invited without seeking to join the field and was committed to remain in student affairs. In every other case an unsolicited invitation to the field seemed highly connected to uncertainty regarding remaining in the field. The one aspect unique to James’ story was his tendency to devalue student affairs despite his lengthy service in and enjoyment for the field. After his invitation to the field James said:

“I had known there was a career, but I always looked down on it so to speak; but I felt I was above it, I think a little bit. At that time, having a couple of those people at that time really allowed me to see it in terms of what it actually was and for me, I don’t think I lowered my sights a little bit, I just started to see higher education, see student affairs as a career was viable and was an option and really made sense to me.”
In other words, based on James recollection of events, the intrinsic decision towards student affairs was different than that of other participants like Jacob and Kaiden. For Jacob and Kaiden, the decision was about deciding to pursue a career in student affairs. James, on the other hand, had already been pursuing a career in student affairs and simply decided that the field was viable. This unique experience separates James from the underlying thematic structure of Theme 3: The manner by which one is called to the field of student affairs is important to discovery of purpose.

Summary

While each of the eight participants had unique journeys towards and within student affairs, there was an essential underlying structure largely inherent to the participant group. Three thematic themes emerged:

1. Conceptualization of the field of student affairs becomes more complicated through each transitional period.
2. Discovery of purpose occurs late; often in the third transitional period.
3. The manner by which one is called to the field of student affairs is important to discovery of purpose.

The essence of the first theme was found through recognizing that participant understanding of student affairs shifted greatly at different moments before and during their time as emerging professionals. The three identified transitional periods (to college, to graduate school and assistantship, and to professional service in the field) served as markers for most participants in the telling of their stories. Conceptualizations of the field became more complicated, or even disparate, as emerging professionals progressed through their narratives.
A review of the second theme highlights the recognition that notions of resolute, self-authored, and impactful purpose do not appear in participant stories until later in the transition process. Such purpose was engaged by only three individuals in the study and always occurred late in the progression of transitional periods. Meaning-making and decisions in the earlier transitional periods tend to be more focused on interest and function as opposed to purpose. Implications for this finding may have significant connection to the expressed attrition problem the study seeks to engage because those participants who were not able to describe purposeful decision making indicated that they were unsure about remaining in the field.

A unifying meaning within the third theme was evident in the relationship between the call to student affairs and the intent to remain in student affairs. In general, individuals who sought out connection to the field based on intrinsic motivation towards a mission within the field articulated clearer senses of purpose and a committed intent to remain in the field. There were two exceptions to this theme. Karen was an exception because the values she placed on happiness after her brother’s death initiated a connection to the field that was unique among participants. James was unique because his intrinsic choice to join the field was less about coming to student affairs and more about allowing himself to see student affairs as a viable career.

The eight participants in this study shared rich descriptions of their own positionality and journeys throughout three transitional periods towards professional service as student affairs practitioners. Underlying shared structure of experience surrounding the discovery of purpose emerged regarding the times, places, and manners by which meaning-making structures – including purpose – were discovered. Discussion of these themes, potential implications, and suggestions for further study will be addressed in the next chapter.
CHAPTER VII - DISCUSSION AND RESEARCH SUGGESTIONS

This study engaged the recognition that as many as three of five new professionals will leave the field of student affairs within their first three years (Renn & Hodges, 2007; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008). Of related concern is the recognition that new professionals struggle to find job satisfaction within student affairs (Herdllein, 2004; Renn & Hodges, 2007; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008; S. A. Saunders et al., 2000; Tull, 2009). A number of studies have focused on strategies within graduate school and/or training and induction programs to combat job dissatisfaction and attrition among new professionals in the field of student affairs (Herdllein, 2004; Renn & Hodges, 2007; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008; S. A. Saunders et al., 2000; Tull, 2009). However, little empirical research has been conducted on the process that a new professional undertakes during their journey into the world of student affairs. Using qualitative methods viewed through phenomenological and narrative lenses to examine participants’ intrinsic motivations, this study sought to illuminate greater understanding of the satisfaction and attrition problem in student affairs.

A vignette recounting an actual instance at a Southeastern research institution served as a point for departure. The vignette highlighted themes such as generational identity and an educational system that has been trending towards commodification both in K-12 and higher education classrooms. Ultimately, the recognition that similar attrition rates in K-12 education seemed to be related to a lack of purpose among new teachers (Darby, 2008; Lasky, 2005; van den Berg, 2002) led to questioning if similar processes are at work in student affairs. Theoretical frames surrounding self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2001; Hodge et al., 2009) and transition theory (Schlossberg et al., 1995) were consulted to develop an interview protocol designed to elicit participant stories regarding discovery of purpose. After conducting interviews and
completing initial coding strategies, a working definition of *purpose* emerged. Purpose was defined as *a self-authored, determined and resolute focus within student affairs that is action oriented, intentional, and impactful*. Refined coding followed by horizontalization and clustering emergent codes rendered a shared experience of transitional timeline as well as three essential themes.

Details regarding the coding and manners by which data were horizontalized and focused into essential themes were shared in chapter six. Here, discussion of each theme in relation to relevant literature and the study’s theoretical frame is capitulated. Commodification and generational identity will be discussed as overarching literary themes from the literature review. Additionally the theoretical frames surrounding transition theory and self-authorship will also be engaged. Finally, suggestions for practice and further research will be shared.

**Review of Emergent Essential Themes**

After intentionally selecting participants for the study, interviews were conducted and transcribed. Significant statements were coded, clustered, and focused into three essential themes which show: (1) *conceptualization of the field of student affairs becomes more complicated through each transitional period*; (2) *discovery of purpose occurs late; often in the third transitional period*; and (3) *the manner by which one is called to the field of student affairs is important to discovery of purpose*. Because of the interrelatedness of the first two themes, discussion and connection to literature will be addressed for both at the same time. The third theme stands on its own in the final discussion.
A Thematic Juncture: Increasing Complexity and the Discovery of Purpose

The first and second themes - (1) *Conceptualization of the field of student affairs becomes more complicated through each transitional period*; and (2) *Discovery of purpose occurs late; often in the third transitional period* – are highly interrelated. Because of this interrelated nature, it is sensible to discuss both together. Below, both themes will be reviewed and a discussion with connections to relevant literature will follow.

**Themes 1 and 2.** The essence of the first theme - *that the conceptualization of the field of student affairs becomes more complicated through each transitional period* - is exemplified in participant responses of struggle with transition and negotiation of new roles throughout their stories. In short, each of the emerging professionals in the study had three very different notions of the field as undergraduates, graduate students, and professionals. In the earliest transitional stage – the transition to college – emerging professionals described understanding of student affairs in connection with something helpful or enjoyable to their college experience. In the second stage – the transition to graduate school and assistantship – emerging professionals tend to recognize that student affairs is a career and that the university is a large, complex place. Ultimately the participants acknowledged their place as developmental and holistic educators as opposed to administrators. In the final stage – the transition to professional service – the emerging professionals in the study struggled with the realities of losing student contact as they move up as well as justifying their own passions within a system of competing goals. Upward mobility was often placed in contrast to achieving ones goals in the field. Some participants seemed to find a way to balance passion and job responsibilities while others chose one over the
other. For instance, we see some participants reject the notion of advancement entirely in favor of personal purpose to impact students directly.

The second emergent theme - *discovery of purpose occurs late; often in the third transitional period* - is illustrated by participant narratives surrounding the discovery of purpose. Only three members of the eight-person participant group identified a resolute, self-authored and impactful purpose. Of the five professionals in the study, only two had identified a purpose by the time of the study. Of the three graduate students only one articulated a similar sense of purpose.

**Connections between Themes 1 and 2.** If the essential themes are accurate, a truly alarming suggestion is presented. The realization that most emerging professionals are likely not aware of how their own personal mission impacts the responsibilities and/or culture associated with professional service in student affairs until after they have taken their first job is problematic. Furthermore, interest or function seemed to be the primary meaning-making strategy that guided decisions until participants were into their professional careers. As was repeatedly seen throughout participant narratives, such decisions based on interest or function often led to loss of interest or connection to the decision at a later date.

Trends that were identified in participant stories regarding the first two essential themes are certainly supported in the literature. First, the struggle between direct impact on students and administrative duties is a microcosm of dualistic explanations of the field’s purpose. The notion that the purpose of student affairs is to educate students holistically (Day et al., 2004; Komives & Woodard, 1996; Nuss, 1996) is held in contrast to the notion that the purpose of the field is to maintain order and stability in the university organization (Birnbaum, 1989; Kerr, 2001; Lucas, 2006; Thelin, 2010, 2011). Second, the acknowledgment of connections to commodified
traditions within education (Noble, 2002; Taubman, 2009) is also useful. Scholars like Noble and Taubman suggest that through a sophisticated system of fragmented curriculum and standardized accountability (through testing) students have been conditioned to avoid rich understandings of material in favor of discrete packets of information. Finally, the recognition of the transitional coping strategies and lack of epistemological self-authorship exhibited by participants is important (Evans et al., 1998; Schlossberg et al., 1995). Specifically low self-authorship with regard to epistemological understanding of student affairs may impact the discovery of purpose. These major connections to the literature are discussed below.

**Connections to Overarching Student Affairs Mission.** Historians of higher education suggest student affairs was designed to ensure that behavioral standards and graduation rates were under control (Lucas, 2006; Thelin, 2011), whereas historians of student affairs suggest the field has always been about a commitment to holistic student development (Nuss, 1996). The realities of modern student affairs work combine both of these assertions (Kuh et al., 2005; Schuh et al., 2010). Participant stories throughout the study defined periods of transition which suggest that this dualistic nature is a source of some struggle for emerging professionals. Each participant identified that upward mobility was very important to them at some point in their development, however, those who articulate purpose in the study often do so by knowingly assuming roles which remove them from upwardly mobile career tracks. Many of those who have not yet defined purpose question whether they will remain in the field.

**Connections to Commodification.** Participants in the study appear to struggle while attempting to engage complex, and even disparate, roles in student affairs arenas. This is apparent when reviewing participant conceptualizations that rely heavily on mentors, graduate
preparation faculty, and literature to define purpose within the field of student affairs. Noble (2002) and Taubman (2009) suggest that the type of education that has become prevalent in U.S. schools conditions individuals to accept discrete parcels of knowledge rather than interrogate the deeper meanings associated with educational material. They describe such a trend as heavily influenced by a movement towards standardized testing and curriculum (Au, 2007; Gerwin & Visone, 2006; Grant, 2003; Lomax et al., 1995). In the case of student affairs, the role of the emerging professional is complex and appears difficult to navigate for some emerging professionals. Based on participant descriptions, it appears as though individuals who are able to engage in more complex interplay between personal ideas and professional missions have greater success articulating purpose.

**Connections to Transition Theory and Self-Authorship.** Decisions regarding the negotiation of the transition into professional service connect heavily to the transition model set forth by Schlossberg et al. (1995). The model indicates four sets of factors which come into play during a transition. The transition model is intersected by Baxter Magolda’s notions of self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2001; Hodge et al., 2009) while connecting to issues of self-understanding. Below the first two factors of transition (situation and self) will be discussed after which the pertinent connections to self-authorship will also be engaged. Following discussion of how transition theory and self-authorship connect to help explore participant narratives, the final two factors with transition theory (support and strategies) will be engaged.

The first factor in transition theory is the *situation.* In this case the situation is a new role; usually the emerging professional’s first professional job. While Schlossberg et al. identify several factors within situation; the notion of a role change is most articulated throughout participant stories. The second major factor identified is the *self,* which is often difficult to see in
participant stories because goals are often articulated through discussion of departmental or student affairs missions. Before moving on to the third and fourth factors in the transition model it is important to adequately address the notion of self within participant narratives.

Baxter Magolda’s (2001) notion of self-authorship naturally connects to the second factor of the transition theory; the self. Baxter Magolda describes a progression from external formulas (wherein knowledge and beliefs are defined by outside sources) through a crossroads (wherein awareness begins to evolve and gain complexity) to self-authorship (wherein personal beliefs are developed based on complex understandings). Furthermore, Baxter Magolda suggests three dimensions that an individual must engage to grow including epistemological (knowledge base), intrapersonal (social identity), and interpersonal (relationships with others) (Baxter Magolda, 2001; Hodge et al., 2009). Participant stories generally suggest that interpersonal and intrapersonal dimensions of self-authorship are relatively well developed. However, epistemological self-authorship with regards to student affairs seems underdeveloped because participant views on knowledge center on departmental or student affairs missions rather than individual connections to the field.

Returning to the transition theory by Schlossberg et al. (1995), support and strategies are the final major factors described to cope with transition. Participants suggest that traditional support structures, such as family, are not an adequate source of help with coping, because it is difficult for family members to understand emerging professional roles in student affairs. Instead support structures seem to be rooted in connection with peers. In the end, participant stories suggest that a range of coping strategies from finding jobs in roles that better suit their passion and purpose, to simply getting used to the changes, developing comfort with the realities of the field, or even leaving the field.
Final Thoughts on Themes 1 and 2. Suggestions that transitional events destabilize emerging professional views of student affairs until well after a functional commitment to the field are rooted in both the literature and unifying themes in participant narratives. For seven of eight participants, discovery of purpose led to commitment to the field, whereas an undefined sense of purpose engendered uncertainty regarding persistence in the field. Might such a connection between interest without purpose and potential flight from the field contribute to attrition among new professionals? The beginnings of such a phenomenon can be seen within emerging professional narratives. Specifically, when participants who had not yet established a resolute, self-authored, and impactful purpose also were unable to articulate any commitment to remain in the field. Qualitative data from eight individuals hardly represents a conclusive proof of such a claim, but the shared underlying structure associated with such an assertion is hard to completely ignore. Further study is needed to examine this alarming trend in participant stories.

Discovery of Purpose or the Lack Thereof in Theme 3

The third emergent theme - the manner by which one is called to the field of student affairs is important to discovery of purpose - is illustrated by a comparison of participant stories. Barring two extenuating circumstances, participants who received encouragement to join the field of student affairs, without first seeking the opportunity themselves, were unable to articulate a clear sense of purpose in the field. Furthermore, these individuals were unsure whether they wished to remain in the field.

Literature regarding self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2001) can provide some support to this emergent theme. Similar to connections regarding the epistemological domain of self-authorship and the first and second emergent themes, emerging professionals who enter the field
by self-authored means, seem to have a head-start towards self-authoring purpose in the field. This assertion is almost “common-sense” because it follows that a person who seeks to and becomes more educated about a field and subsequently determines that the field is in line with their own passions is more able to establish a resolute purpose in the profession. This is in contrast to a number of participants who had little if any recognition of student affairs before deciding to pursue a career within the field.

Discussions regarding the manners by which emerging professionals are called to student affairs suggest that would-be mentors and recruiters of those interested in student affairs should take care with the offer to join. The concern here is not with the intrinsic call. Indeed, participants who demonstrated an internally-driven call to the field were quite committed to their purpose in student affairs. However, among the narratives regarding invitations or suggestions to join the field two predominant situations arise. On the one hand, the invitation is made to a student who has voiced that they have no plans and are worried about the next step. On the other hand, the call is made to individuals pursuing other career options. The implications of such actions might be viewed as falling anywhere on a spectrum from benevolent to reckless. It is reasonable to assume that student affairs practitioners are only trying to help students; in fact participant narratives suggest this is a primary draw to the field. However, is it prudent to invite a student in a vulnerable position with regards to transition and self-authorship to join the field?

I have voiced concerns which seemingly describe would-be mentors in student affairs as problematic agents which push vulnerable students into a field for which they ultimately have no passion or purpose. Such a position is certainly an extreme inference to glean from participant narratives in the study. Rather, this assertion is presented as a possible worst-case scenario based on participant stories which, up to this point bear some troubling resemblances to such a
scenario. Further research is certainly needed to more deeply explore and understand the concerns surrounding external invitations to join the field.

A Note Regarding Other Literature

The primary emphases within the related literature for this study focused on helping define an operational definition of purpose through theoretical frames, addressing external impacts such as education policy and generational traits, and reviewing cursory connection to student affairs literature on new professionals. Connections to this literature have been made in the discussion of the findings with two notable exceptions. First, because the interview protocol was so focused on intrinsic motivation, student affairs literature on external introductory functions like training or supervision did not come into play directly. Instead, the review of this literature in chapter two serves to set the stage and acknowledge alternate emphasis to intrinsic notions among emerging professionals. Additionally, no overwhelming ties to generational identity were shared throughout participant narratives. Though these topics were not directly discerned within participant stories, their import to the context of the research is important.

Conclusion

Through a qualitative approach with phenomenological and narrative lenses, this study explored how eight emerging student affairs professionals experienced the discovery of purpose, or the lack thereof, within the field. Essential themes suggested that understandings of the field of student affairs were fragmented for participants until later in their journey. Furthermore the manners by which the emerging professionals received the call to the field were paramount when foreshadowing one’s ability to find and articulate purpose within the field. In the end, this study provided recognition of several interesting relationships regarding the manners by which
emerging professionals make meaning of transitional experiences and changing roles in the field of student affairs. Essentially, self-authorship in the epistemological dimension was identified as low when engaging with the mission of student affairs until later in emerging professionals’ stories.

It is hoped that readers will come away from this study with a greater understanding of the journey an emerging professional makes through several transitional periods. The ability for readers to connect with participant stories is an expressed goal of the phenomenological lens of this study (Creswell, 1998). Several notable suggestions for further study are highlighted below. These suggestions are based on addressing aspects of the issues surrounding new professional purpose and attrition that could not or did not emerge as a result of the limitations in research design or progression of the study.

**Suggestions for the Field**

Though qualitative examinations are not specifically designed to yield generalizable data in the manner that quantitative studies might (Creswell, 2009; Lichtman, 2006) some suggestions are worthwhile to consider in light of this study’s findings. This is so because the triangulated, horizontalized data suggests a common experience among emerging professionals that is too powerful to be ignored. Below some suggestions for graduate faculty, student affairs mentors and supervisors, and finally emerging professionals are highlighted.

**Suggestions for Higher Education Administration Faculty.** Participant stories suggest that graduate faculty are usually the first academic connection to student affairs that emerging professionals encounter. Participants said the transition period including graduate school involved a period of enlightenment with regards to understanding student development and
student learning. However, two areas of concern were illuminated that graduate faculty might engage. First, participants admitted they often entered graduate programs with little to no understanding of the field. Second, participants acknowledged the recognition that administrative duties afford little time for student development was an unwelcomed surprise that was often deferred until after graduate school. Graduate faculty might better serve emerging professionals and the field of student affairs by seeking to do what they can to combat these issues.

Most participants in the study demonstrated a very poor understanding of the field of student affairs upon entering graduate study. This seems natural since the students were ostensibly attending the graduate program to learn about the field. However, when students set forth on a path of study which lead directly to a fairly limited set of employment options (i.e. it was unlikely a converted pre-med student would find their way back to medical school), some direction should have been present. Faculty might screen for such a sense of direction during admissions essays or interviews. Specifically faculty should look for the beginnings of resolute, self-authored purpose within the field in contrast to mere interest or lack of other options.

Participants also discussed a very one-sided portrayal of the field within graduate coursework. Specifically, emerging professional notions of student affairs purpose seem very rooted in student development and almost completely ignore administrative functions. A greater emphasis should be placed on such administrative applications, but a sophisticated and nuanced approach is required. Rather than simply adding courses or units, a faculty member might seek to integrate organizational and administrative components to all theoretical discussion. For instance, when discussing plans for co-curricular programming applications in as many as 10 on-campus communities, graduate students might be prompted to consider the logistical realities of on-campus partners’ schedules. Connections which ask students to acknowledge administrative
functions that are inexorably linked to student development may help illuminate more balanced practice in student affairs.

Faculty in higher education administration programs can certainly impact students in ways no one else can. By engaging in realistic conversations about the realities of professional life in student affairs early and often, faculty might assist graduate students to more easily find their purpose. However, faculty cannot complete this task alone. Both student affairs practitioners and the emerging professionals themselves must contribute as well.

**Suggestions for Student Affairs Supervisors and Mentors.** Participants in the study often discussed instances where they were encouraged, or invited to join the field of student affairs. Emergent themes within the study suggest that when student affairs professionals invite undergraduate students who have little knowledge of student affairs to join the field, the invitee often struggles to find self-authored purpose. Student affairs practitioners should take care when extending invitations to join the field and recognize the potential for harm that exists in such an invitation. Specifically, the expressed fear surrounds encouraging a student with no connected purpose within the field to spend time and money in graduate school only to emerge as a professional with no resolute purpose in the field. A proactive solution might be in-services or workshops for interested students early in their senior year which can help such students understand the field and their purpose within it. Like the suggestions to faculty, it is recommended that a realistic and total appraisal of the field be given.

**Suggestions for Emerging Student Affairs Professionals.** Participants in this study often acknowledged a sense of helplessness and/or aimlessness when leaving undergraduate studies. A confounding variable to this moment was often the invitation to join the field of
Emerging professionals should take care to learn about student affairs and understand the complex interplay between administration and student learning that is inherent to the field before taking advice from another; no matter how seasoned the mentor may be in the field of student affairs. Furthermore, emerging professionals are encouraged to explore the reasons why they are interested in student affairs. Is the motivation interest-based or related to convenience or function? Participants in the study who entered the field under those terms often were not able to resolutely confirm intent to remain in the field and did not express great happiness in the job. Connecting to an intrinsic, self-authored purpose yielded a different thought process all together wherein higher satisfaction and intent to remain in the field followed. Finding a solid reason to be in the field of student affairs, rooted in purpose, seemed to be connected to job satisfaction and retention in the field throughout this study.

**Suggestions for Further Research**

After gathering and analyzing data, it was immediately realized that hearing opinions of individuals outside of the participant delimitations would add to the study. Because of the focus on participant stories, added input from other sources was better left to follow-up studies. Such plans are highlighted here.

1. A similar study should be conducted – potentially with the same interview protocol – inviting participants who have decided to leave the field. Hearing the stories of those who left the field may provide better data regarding dissatisfaction and attrition in student affairs.
2. Similarly, another study seeking to tell the stories of mid-managers who have moved just beyond their journey as emerging professionals might better highlight issues surrounding satisfaction and persistence in the field.

3. Participant stories surrounding the call to the field were particularly interesting. With specific regard to the external invitation or suggestion to join the field, a qualitative study could be designed to explore the stories of mentors and would-be recruiters regarding the other side of the invitation.

In addition to further qualitative research, greater efforts at generalizability could also be made. Because the study was designed as a qualitative examination generalizable data was not an expected outcome. Below are several suggestions for studies which might better produce data set that are generalizable throughout a given population.

1. A questionnaire developed based on the findings of this study regarding understanding of the field during different transitional moments, the call to the field, and conceptualizations of purpose.

2. A survey of mid-level and upper-level student affairs practitioners to better illuminate how the experiences highlighted by emerging professional impact careers in student affairs further along through the years.

3. A consensus study such as a Delphi Method to gather general agreements regarding purpose, satisfaction, and attrition of new professionals. Such implements could be used with mid-level, upper-level, and entry-level staff to illustrate different perspectives.
REFERENCES


Land Grant Aid of Colleges (1862).


Secretary of Agriculture to administer annual college-aid appropriation (1890).


APPENDIX A – INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Tell me the story of how you came to student affairs? What was/were your major(s) in undergrad? How did you choose those?
2. What are your goals in student affairs and/or higher education? Why? How do you or will you achieve that vision? (If a goal is represented as a title or particular achievement)
3. Have your goals changed in the time you’ve been in student affairs?
4. Tell me about a time when you had to explain your job and/or student affairs as a whole to someone unfamiliar to higher education administration (Family, Friend, etc.). What did you say to explain it to them?
5. When you talk about career with colleagues or classmates, what are the big issues you discuss? What do those conversations usually sound like?
6. Why are you in the field of student affairs? What do you feel your purpose in the field is?
APPENDIX B – PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT LETTER

Hello,

My name is Nik Clegorne. I am an Assistant Director in the Department of Residential Life. I am also a Ph.D candidate in Louisiana State University’s Educational Leadership, Research, and Counseling program. I am conducting data collection to complete the research for my dissertation entitled: The Lived Experience of Discovery of Purpose in Student Affairs among Emerging Professionals.

I am seeking participants to speak with in a 30 to 45 minute interview regarding your experiences surrounding your entry and continued persistence in the field of student affairs. I am specifically recruiting those who are within their first three years for professional service or are attending classes for a master’s degree in Higher Education Administration.

Participation in this study will give voice to your experience as an emerging professional and add to the general knowledge about passion and purpose within the field of student affairs. There are no anticipated risks or discomforts for those who do participate. You will not be personally identified when the results of this study are reported.

Nik Clegorne
Assistant Director
Residence Education: Training and Leadership Development
Department of Residential Life
Louisiana State University
Grace King Hall 205
Baton Rouge, LA 70803
Office: (225)-578-8945
nocnik@lsu.edu
APPENDIX C – PARTICIPANT SCHEDULEING FORM

1. **Contact Info**
   - Name: (open field)
   - Email Address: (open field)
   - Phone Number: (open field)

2. **Sex (choices)**
   - Would prefer not to answer
   - Male
   - Female

3. **Race/Ethnicity (choices)**
   - Would prefer not to answer
   - American Indian or Alaskan Native
   - Asian
   - Black or African-American
   - From multiple races
   - Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
   - White

4. **Please select the description which most closely applies to you. (choices)**
   - I am a masters student in the first year of my degree
   - I am a masters student in the second year of my degree
   - I am a professional in the first year of my student affairs career
   - I am a professional in the second year of my student affairs career
   - I am a professional in the third year of my student affairs career
   - none of these apply to me

5. **Please select the description which most closely applies to you. (choices)**
   - Prior to undergraduate study
   - Freshman year
   - Sophomore year
   - Junior year
   - Senior year
   - After undergraduate study
APPENDIX D – INFORMED CONSENT

INFORMED CONSENT

1. Study Title: The Lived Experience of Discovery of Purpose in Student affairs among Emerging Professionals.

2. Performance Site: Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College

3. Investigators: The following investigators are available for questions about this study, M-F, 8:00 a.m. - 4:30p.m.
Nicholas Clegorne 578-8945

4. Purpose of the Study: To engage the lived experience of discovering purpose in academic and professional practices within the field of student affairs; specifically the experience of emerging student affairs professionals.

5. Subject Inclusion: Students in the Higher education Administration Master’s Program and Student Life and Enrollment Services Employees.

6. Number of subjects: 5 – 25

7. Study Procedures: The study will consist of a 30 to 60 minute interview of each participant followed by three rounds of data verification via email. During data verification participants will be asked to review researcher notes and codes regarding their statements to ensure the comments are accurately represented.

8. Benefits: Subjects will contribute to research that better informs the field of student affairs regarding their perspectives and points of view.

9. Risks: The only potential risk is inadvertent identification of participant responses. It is not expected that any line of inquiry will solicit information that would be harmful to a participant and participants’ identities will be kept private.

10. Right to Refuse: Subjects may choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of any benefit to which they might otherwise be entitled.

11. Privacy: Results of the study may be published, but no names or identifying information will be included in the publication. Subject identity will remain confidential unless disclosure is required by law.

12. Signatures: The study has been discussed with me and all my questions have been answered. I may direct additional questions regarding study specifics to the investigators. If I have questions about subjects’ rights or other concerns, I can contact Robert C. Mathews, Institutional Review Board,(225) 578-8692, irb@lsu.edu, www.lsu.edu/irb. I agree to participate in the study described above and acknowledge the investigator's obligation to provide me with a signed copy of this consent form.

Participant Signature: ___________________________________________ Date: _____________
APPENDIX E – IRB APPROVAL

Application for Exemption from Institutional Oversight

Unless qualified as meeting the specific criteria for exemption from Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversight, ALL LSU research/ projects using living humans as subjects, or samples, or data obtained from humans, directly or indirectly, with or without their consent, must be approved or exempted in advance by the LSU IRB. This Form helps the PI determine if a project may be exempted, and is used to request an exemption.

- Applicant, please fill out the application in its entirety and include the completed application as well as parts A-E, listed below, when submitting to the IRB. Once the application is completed, please submit two copies of the completed application to the IRB Office or to a member of the Human Subjects Screening Committee. Members of this committee can be found at http://www.lsu.edu/screeningmembers.shtml.

- A Complete Application Includes All of the Following:
  (A) Two copies of this completed form and two copies of part B thru E.
  (B) A project description (adequate to evaluate risks to subjects and to explain your responses to Parts 1 & 2).
  (C) Copies of all instruments to be used.

- If this proposal is part of a grant proposal, include a copy of the proposal and all recruitment materials.

- The consent form that you will use in the study (see part 3 for more information).

- Certificate of Completion of Human Subjects Protection Training for all personnel involved in the project, including students who are involved with testing or handling data, unless already on file with the IRB. Training link: http://phrp.nihtraining.com/users/login.php.


1) Principal Investigator: Nicholas Clegerno
   Rank: PhD Candidate
   Dept: Education (Grad School)  Phone: 225-578-0945  Email: nclegerno@lsu.edu

2) Co Investigator(s): please include department, rank, phone and e-mail for each

3) Project Title: THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF DISCOVERY OF PURPOSE IN STUDENT AFFAIRS AMONG LEADING PROFESSIONALS

4) Proposal? Yes or No
   Yes, LSU Proposal Number

   Also, if YES, either
   ○ This application completely matches the scope of work in the grant
   ○ More IRB Applications will be filed later

5) Subject pool (e.g., Psychology students, HE Admin, Master's Students and Student Life Employee's)
   *Circle any "vulnerable populations" to be used: (children <18; the mentally impaired; pregnant women; the aged, etc.). Projects with incarcerated persons cannot be exempted.

6) PI Signature ___________________________ Date 2/2/12 (no per signatures)

**I certify my responses are accurate and complete. If the project scope or design is later changed, I will resubmit for review. I will obtain written approval from the Authorized Representative of all non-LSU Institutions in which the study is conducted. I also understand that it is my responsibility to maintain copies of all consent forms at LSU for three years after completion of the study. If I leave LSU before that time the consent forms should be preserved in the Departmental Office.

Screening Committee Action: Exempted X  Not Exempted Category/Paragraph

Reviewer: S. K. Signature: S. K. MacGregor  Date: 2/6/2012
VITA

Nicholas Clegorne was born and raised in Ocala, Florida. He attended high school at North Marion High School in Sparr, Florida. Clegorne attended college at the University of Florida where he earned a Bachelor of Music degree in Music Education in the fall of 2002. After completing this degree, Clegorne continued with music education, eventually earning a Master of Music in the spring of 2004. During undergraduate and graduate study Clegorne was also heavily active within Residential Life at the University of Florida. In summer of 2004 he accepted a Residential Life Coordinator position with the Department of Residential Life at Louisiana State University. He was promoted to Training and Development Coordinator in 2006 and began doctoral study in Educational Leadership and Research. Clegorne was again promoted to Assistant Director in Fall of 2010. Clegorne earned a doctorate in Educational Leadership and Research with dual emphases on Higher Education Administration and Curriculum and Instruction from Louisiana State University in August of 2012, completing a dissertation that examined the discovery of purpose among emerging student affairs professionals.