

ETHICS AND DECISION-MAKING BY HIGHER EDUCATION ADMINISTRATORS IN
INTERCOLLEGIATE ATHLETICS AND STUDENT AFFAIRS

By

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ABSTRACT

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Given the sheer number of decisions made by administrators in higher education and the often significant impact of those decisions, one might think that research into how these decisions are made would be extensive. However, that has not been the case. This study was an attempt to address that hole in the literature. Specifically, I was interested in understanding what factors influence the decision-making of higher education administrators in student affairs and intercollegiate athletics, how these administrators handle conflicts between the influential factors, and if/how the administrators engage their personal ethics during their decision-making process.

To answer these questions, semi-structured interviews were conducted with higher education administrators in student affairs and intercollegiate athletics. Participants were asked to describe a tough decision, and then they completed a hands-on activity designed to help them reflect on the factors that influenced that decision and how those factors interacted. Next, they answered questions about their general decision-making and ethics. Finally, they listened to two case studies and answered questions about the decision-making they would undertake in each situation.

Analysis of the data revealed eight categories of factors that influence administrative decision-making. Those categories were: students, institution, people, process/regulations, money/other resources, professional identity, the situation, and the right thing to do/personal ethics. Participants identified numerous conflicts between these influential factors. Resolving

those conflicts typically meant prioritizing one factor over others. Often, though not always, participants prioritized students, and in particular students' best interests, when attempting to resolve conflicts between influences and make their final decision. The frameworks of the four ethics (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2000) and moral intensity (Jones, 1991) provided helpful guidance in understanding how the various factors interact and how they influence decision-making.

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This dissertation is dedicated to my family. Your love and encouragement during this long, challenging process helped get me through. Thank you for always believing in me! Dad, who knew when you took me to get that first library card when I was four that I'd be writing my own book one day. Mom, we sure had some dragons to slay this past year, but we made it through!

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Statement of Problem

Colleges and universities, no matter their size, are complex institutions that serve multiple constituencies. Students, faculty, staff, trustees, alumni, donors, and community members all have needs to be met, and issues of finance, personnel, recruitment, retention, curriculum, and governance must be addressed. As such, administrators at these institutions face a daily barrage of challenging situations which they have been entrusted to handle by making decisions that should protect their students and their institutions. Once the decisions are made, their outcomes play out on campuses and/or in the news. However, the public typically knows very little about the thought processes behind those decisions. We judge the outcomes and consequences but are left to speculate about how and why the administrators arrived at the decision they did.

The decisions that often draw the most speculation are those that result in scandal and tragedy. One such example centers around the events that transpired at Penn State University in 2011–2012 as a result of child abuse charges, and later convictions, against former assistant football coach Jerry Sandusky. Reports suggest that Penn State administrators at the time were aware of Sandusky's actions and the allegations against him but did nothing to stop him (Freeh, Sporkin & Sullivan, LLP., 2012). Specifically, three now-former administrators, university president Graham Spanier, vice president Gary Schultz, and athletic director Tim Curley, were implicated in the cover-up. These men lost their jobs and faced serious legal consequences, including eventually serving jail time, as a result of the situation (Chappell, 2012; Miller, 2017). In a case like this, it is particularly easy to ask “what were these men thinking?” and “where were their ethics?”

While scandals and negativity tend to draw the most media attention and the most questions, there are plenty of other examples of complex, ethically-challenging decisions in higher education, and those examples also lead to interesting questions. One such example occurred after a community college basketball game in 2013. At the end of the game, a brawl erupted. As a result of that brawl, one player from the visiting Indian Hills Community College (IHCC) was arrested and taken to jail. Later that day, the IHCC president Jim Lindenmayer, who made the trip to watch the game, bailed the player out of jail and returned him to campus. In doing so, Lindenmayer violated NJCAA policy which states that “[n]o college personnel, nor representative of a member college’s athletic interest may post bail or provide legal counsel for a student-athlete” (NJCAA Handbook & Casebook, 2016–2017, p. 79). As a consequence of the violation, the NJCAA banned the 3rd ranked Indian Hills team from post-season competition and put them on probation (Jackson, 2013).

According to Lindenmayer, “after everyone was on their way home, I bailed a student-athlete out of jail. I was unaware of the rule, but I knew that I did not want to leave a player behind at an out of town facility” (Jackson, 2013, p. 1). Lindenmayer continued,

I feel strongly that when we leave our campus with students in our care it is our duty to return them safely to campus. This is what I would expect of any staff member and what I would expect as a parent of a child under college supervision. (p. 1)

While these quotes may provide some insight into Lindenmayer’s thought process, questions still remain. What if Lindenmayer had known about the rule? How would he have reconciled the conflict between the rule and its potential consequences and his personal ethics? What other factors did he consider while making his decision?

While these two examples come from intercollegiate athletics, athletic administrators are not the only ones making decisions with ethical implications that impact the institution and its students. Arguably, every decision made across campus, from faculty promotion and tenure to facilities maintenance affects students in some way. However, some administrators deal with more student-centered issues than others. Specifically, similar to athletic administrators, student affairs administrators deal very directly with student concerns, and in many ways, the issues faced in the two areas are similar. Students' personal and academic futures, their health, safety, and well-being, and sometimes even their lives, rest on the decisions made by these particular higher education administrators. For example, it is not hard to imagine that instead of a basketball player in a brawl, there might be an environmental club member arrested while participating in a demonstration or protest. Would an administrator bail that student out of jail?

Other similarities between the two areas exist as well. Both groups focus on extra-curricular activities that fall outside of classroom instruction and yet have significant, and often very public influences, on students. Additionally, as part of the overall institution, both athletics and student affairs are subject to state and federal laws. Title IX, for example, affects both departments in different but significant ways. In previous decades of Title IX enforcement, significant attention was focused on the gender inequities of college athletics, and athletic departments often had to make changes to things like the type and number of teams they sponsored and the facilities of the men's and women's team (Lieberwitz, et al., 2016). More recently the focus of Title IX enforcement has expanded, and administrators across campus, particularly those in student affairs, find themselves focused on Title IX issues related to sexual harassment/sexual assault (Lieberwitz, et al., 2016).

The topic of Title IX also provides a good example of a recent, complex decision in student affairs in which administrators were faced with ethical challenges and conflicting influences on their decision-making. In 2016, Michigan State University officials analyzed the legal and ethical ramifications of maintaining or closing the women's lounge in the MSU student union. Original to the building's construction in 1925, the lounge provided women a safe, quiet space to study and relax for almost a century (Jaschik, 2016). However, the legality of having such a gender exclusive space in the Union was questioned in light of Title IX's prohibition of gender discrimination (Jaschik, 2016). Male and transgender students as well as a professor from another institution complained that restricting the space to only women was discriminatory and illegal (Jaschik, 2016). While the ultimate decision to close the lounge may seem like the clear-cut, legal, non-discriminatory choice, there were other issues at play. For example, in recent years sexual harassment and assault has received a lot of attention on college campuses. Protecting students, most often women, from harassment and assault, and handling the consequences of harassment or assault in a timely, respectful way are also very important components of Title IX compliance. The women who spoke out against the closing of the women's lounge cited several incidents of harassment and assault endured in the union's main, gender-inclusive lounge and championed the women's lounge as a much safer space (Jaschik, 2016). While administrators made the decision to close the lounge, what is not known is how those administrators prioritized the various factors weighing on this decision or if/how their personal ethics factored into the decision.

Given the similarities of their roles, the many decision-making situations they face where ethics and other factors might conflict, and the consequences of their decisions, interviewing both student affairs administrators and athletic administrators seemed like an appropriate way to

begin to understand administrative decision-making within higher education. Not surprising, research suggests that both sets of administrators deal with a wide range of internal and external influences on their decision-making (Auerbach, 2008; Hamrick & Klein, 2015; Hirko, 2011; Ward, 2011). What we do not know is whether those influences are the same or different for administrators in the two areas and whether different administrators prioritize these factors differently when making decisions. Certainly, recent scandals have caused many to question the decision-making of administrators when athletics are involved. One has to wonder: if Jerry Sandusky had been an assistant dean, instead of an assistant football coach, would so many administrators have ignored/covered up his behavior? More broadly we wonder: have the outside pressures, media attention, and mountains of money in intercollegiate athletics somehow altered the decision-making process for these administrators? In light of these questions and the situations mentioned above, the purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of the decision-making process of higher education administrators, specifically administrators in student affairs and intercollegiate athletics.

Research Questions

Higher education administrators make institutional decisions on a daily basis, and the only thing most of us know about those decisions is their outcomes. Often, we find ourselves asking “what were they thinking?”, but what if we could actually know more about the process that went into making those decisions? That was the goal of this study. In general, I wanted to learn more about the decision-making of higher education administrators in intercollegiate athletics and student affairs. Specifically, I wanted to know:

1. What factors influence the decision-making of higher education administrators in student affairs and intercollegiate athletics?

2. How do higher education administrators in student affairs and intercollegiate athletics handle conflicts between the factors that influence their decision-making?
3. Do/how do higher education administrators in student affairs and intercollegiate athletics engage their personal ethics during the decision-making process?

Given the volume and intensity of decisions higher education administrators make on a daily basis, all of the questions above seem worthy of study. After all, “[e]thical decision making is a key responsibility of leadership,” and understanding the factors that influence the decision-making of higher education administrators might lead to more careful decision-making and help prevent future scandals (Oliver & Hioco, 2012, p. 251). Gaining that understanding might also make the every-day decision-making process more transparent and less of a struggle for administrators. Considering the importance of this topic, one might think that a significant amount of research on the topic would already exist. However, that is not really the case.

Empirical research on ethics and administrative decision-making in educational settings is limited. In higher education, it is particularly rare. As Counelis (1993) described it, an “absence of empirical data about a university’s [administrators’] ethical behavior is a serious institutional defect” (p. 86). Over twenty years later, Keenan (2014) expressed similar concern over this lack of attention to the topic. He found it particularly

alarming inasmuch as academics, more than business people, nurses, doctors, and lawyers, develop their careers precisely by writing books . . . [W]hile we publish books on professional ethics in other fields, we apparently have very little interest in the field of professional academic ethics. (p. 161)

He went on to say that “we have lived and worked wearing blinders to our lack of professional ethics” (p. 162). Only a very few researchers have tried to remove their blinders and fill in the gap by studying ethics and decision-making in higher education.

Before attempting to fill in the gaps in research, it is important to review what we do know. Chapter 2 provides a review of that information divided into three sections: conceptualizations of ethics and decision-making, empirical research on ethics and decision-making in education, and theoretical frameworks about ethics and decision-making. To begin the conceptual section of the literature review, I clarify the differences between ethics, values, and morals. I also examine various philosophical and psychological conceptualizations of ethics and their relationship to decision-making. Next I provide an overview of several potential influences on decision-making. When discussing external influences, I focus on institutional, legal, and policy influences. Next, the sub-section on decision-specific influences focuses on Jones’ (1991) framework for examining how the moral intensity of a decision and its consequences might influence the decision-maker. In the empirical subsection of Chapter 2, I examine the limited empirical research about ethics and decision-making in educational settings, much of which focuses on the K–12 setting. I conclude Chapter 2 by discussing the theoretical frameworks of ethics and decision-making guiding this project, the four ethics (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2000) and Jones’s (1991) framework for moral intensity.

Chapter 3 describes the research design of this study. Methodologically, conducting interviews seemed like the best way to attempt to understand what factors influence administrators’ decision-making, how they handle conflicts between the factors that influence their decision-making, and how they do or do not engage their personal ethics during decision-making. Coming from a constructivist viewpoint, I was most interested in allowing participants

to tell their stories. To obtain those stories, qualitative, semi-structured interviews with student affairs and athletic administrators at three institutions were conducted.

In Chapter 4 I describe the findings from those interviews. Analysis of the data revealed eight categories of factors that influence administrative decision-making. Those categories are students, institutional context, people/relationships, process/regulations (policies/laws/rules), money/other resources, the situation, professional identity, and the right thing to do/personal ethics. In addition to detailing the ways these factors influenced the decision-making of study participants, I also examine participants' reflections on conflicts between the factors and how they handle those conflicts.

In Chapter 5 I discuss the connections between my findings and the theoretical frameworks guiding this study—the four ethics (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2000) and Jones' (1991) framework of moral intensity. Substantial connections between my findings and both frameworks are detailed. Additionally, I offer implications for theory and practice and avenues for future research.

As a former collegiate student-athlete, coach, and athletic director/assistant dean of students, and as someone with aspirations of attaining a position in upper level administration, I find the issue of administrative decision-making in higher education to be one of great personal and professional import. However, there are also much larger implications to determining the influence of ethics on administrative decision-making. Given the complexity of intercollegiate athletics and student affairs, I believe it is important to understand how administrators maneuver the myriad of conflicting factors weighing on their decision-making and in what ways they engage their personal ethics during the process. It is my hope that knowledge of these decision-making processes can assist college and university leaders in making more conscious decisions

regarding their institutions and specifically intercollegiate athletics and student affairs. With students' lives and futures resting on these decisions, I believe individuals and institutions have a lot to gain from having a clearer picture of how individual decisions are made. Additionally, a closer look at the ways certain factors, like institutional policies or NCAA rules, conflict with decision-makers' personal ethics, might suggest to policy-makers it is time to revisit their policies in the hopes of decreasing these conflicts.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to write a literature review related to the ethics and decision-making of higher education administrators, it is necessary to unpack the topic. Ethics and decision-making are complex topics that have been written about for hundreds of years by philosophers, psychologists, theologians, doctors, lawyers, business people, and educators, and every group has had their own specific take on the topics. Given the abundance of information to be covered, this literature review is divided into three broad sections: conceptualizations of ethics and decision-making, empirical research on ethics and decision-making in education, and theoretical frameworks. In the conceptual section, I first provide a brief clarification of terms and then delve into some of the philosophical and psychological conceptualizations of ethics and decision-making. Next I examine external influences on decision-making such as institutional/departmental factors and laws/policies, and then I discuss decision-specific factors such as those identified in Jones' (1991) moral intensity model (magnitude of consequences, social consensus, probability of effect, temporal immediacy, proximity, and concentration of effect). Acknowledging and examining the conceptual complexity of ethics and decision-making allows for a more concentrated, critical examination of the limited empirical research on ethics and decision-making in education. That empirical research is the focus of the second section of the literature review. The third section of the review focuses on the theoretical frameworks that guide this project.

Conceptualizations of Ethics and Decision-making

Ethics, Values, and Morals

Before considering if and/or how ethics are engaged during decision-making, it is important to define ethics as well as related terms such as values and morals. While the three

terms are often used interchangeably, there are some distinctions that can be made. To begin with, values can be defined as “implicit or explicit assertions of what is desirable, of worth,” or of importance (Kasten & Ashbaugh, 1991, p. 55). Said more plainly, the term values refers to a broad range of people’s preferences, not all of which have to do with right and wrong (Frick, 2009). Morals then are “a special class of values where differentiations between good and evil, right and wrong . . . are made” (Frick, 2009, p. 51). With the relationship between values and morals clarified, the next task is figuring out how ethics relates to those terms. Klugman and Stump (2006) described morals as “the set of beliefs a person has about what is right and wrong in the world” and ethics as “the science of reasoning” (p. 186). To put it another way, “morality is what people do and ethics is the study of what people ought to do” (Davis, 2003, p. 116). Additionally, Robbins and Trabichet (2009) offered this definition: “Ethics is an element of philosophy that reflects upon good and evil and upon moral norms” (p. 51). It is perhaps not surprising then that philosophers talk more about ethics and psychologists talk more about morals. While they may use different terms, both groups investigate how an individual’s thoughts and beliefs, about what they should or should not do, influence their decision-making. The next subsections focus on philosophical and psychological conceptualizations of ethics and decision-making.

Philosophical Conceptualizations of Ethics and Decision-making

One way to conceptualize and discuss philosophical theories of ethics involves looking at the paradigms of the ethic of justice, the ethic of critique, the ethic of care, and the ethic of the profession (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2000). Sometimes discussed in isolation, but often in conjunction with each other, each ethic has its own distinct focus. A close examination of each of

the four ethics provides a starting point for understanding how personal ethics factor into administrative decision-making in higher education.

Ethic of justice. Of the four ethics, the ethic of justice covers some of the oldest theories on ethics and perhaps the broadest conceptualizations of what ethics should be. Going back as far as Aristotle, the ethic of justice concerns itself with rights, laws, democracy, and the individual's role in society (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011). Ethic of justice theories are often placed into one of two categories—teleological or deontological.

Teleological frameworks focus on the outcomes or results of decision making. In other words, “teleological theories are consequentialist, as they judge rightness or wrongness of an act based on a comparative assessment of the consequences” (Oliver & Hioco, 2012, p. 243). A specific example of this kind of framework is Utilitarianism, championed by John Stuart Mill. Utilitarianism states decisions that result in the most good for the most people are ethical decisions (Johnson, 2009; Malloy & Zakus, 1995; Mill & Sher, 2001; Oliver & Hioco, 2012; Robbins & Trabichet, 2009). Again, it is the outcome or result of a decision that matters most in teleological frameworks.

Deontological frameworks, on the other hand, focus on the intent rather than the outcome (Wood & Hilton, 2012). The cornerstone of these frameworks is the concept that there are universal truths (or principals of right and wrong) that ought to be followed regardless of any possible consequences or outcomes. Individuals “should make objective decisions based upon predetermined rules and principles” (Wood & Hilton, 2012, p. 201). “From this perspective, leaders’ decisions are guided through extant laws, rules, policies, codes, and procedures” (Wood & Hilton, 2012, p. 200). Two of the more widely known examples from this framework come from Immanuel Kant and John Rawls. Kant believed ethical decisions are decisions that meet the

idea of the categorical imperative wherein an individual wants his or her decision to be universally adopted by everyone else (Oliver & Hioco, 2012). For example, even if someone cheats in business, that person probably does not want everyone else to cheat; thus, deciding to cheat would be an unethical decision.

Similarly, John Rawls focused on what would be fair for everyone. Rawls did not accept the utilitarian idea of the greatest good for the greatest number of people. In fact, Rawls argued “that the loss of freedom for some is [not] made right by a greater good shared by others” (Rawls, 1971, p. 3). Rawls believed in justice as fairness for all, and he believed decisions and laws should be made from behind a “veil of ignorance.” His argument was that if decision makers did not know whether they would incur the positive or negative consequences of a decision or a law, they would make decisions and laws that are fair for everyone.

Whether teleological or deontological, the different viewpoints that fall under the ethic of justice do have certain ideas in common. At their heart is the issue of the individual’s place in society and how the individual’s decisions connect them to others. In the context of this study, an administrator might talk about deciding to fund Program A over Program B because Program A would provide the greatest good for the great number of students. A different administrator might talk about following the same rule in every situation because the rule makes it fair for everyone. While these two administrators are using different criteria to make their decisions, both are espousing an ethic of justice.

Ethic of critique. Like Rawls, other scholars, including Foucault and Freire, were also concerned about what was fair for everyone. However, Foucault, Freire, and others like them questioned and criticized the laws, the lawmakers, and the “legitimacy of social arrangements” (Frick, 2011, p. 530). This ethic of critique, an outgrowth of critical theory, seeks to understand

inconsistencies within our laws and our conceptualizations of ethics (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2000). Discontent with issues such as power, privilege, culture, bureaucracy, language, competing interests, and the disproportionate distribution of resources—all of which were seen as barriers to fairness, justice and equity—led to a desire to challenge the status quo. Decision-makers who embrace the ethic of critique do not just consider whether or not something is against the law; they consider whether the law itself is just, who had a voice in making the law, and who is being impacted by the law and in what way. In higher education,

the ethic of critique stresses [administrators'] obligation to re-examine and confront social norms, institutions, and infrastructure that harm and oppress weaker populations. Its aim is to expose and undermine the accepted power structures so as to advocate an alternative social narrative. (Eyal, Berkovich, & Schwartz, 2011, p. 398)

An administrator deciding to change an admission policy that disadvantages certain groups of students provides an example of the ethic of critique at work.

Ethic of care. Like critical theorists, feminist scholars were also dissatisfied with the ethic of justice. Both groups brought attention to issues of social responsibility, injustice, and empowerment (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2000, p. 16). However, rather than advocating for changes that could make the ethic of justice more equitable, feminist scholars like Gilligan and Noddings advocated for the use of a new ethic entirely. These scholars were frustrated with the conceptualization of ethics and decision-making being all about laws, rules, and/or strict moral codes. Instead, they proposed the use of the ethic of care. The ethic of care “is concerned with how, in general, we should meet and treat one another—with how to establish, maintain, and enhance caring relationships” (Noddings, 2013, p. xiv). It is about nurturing, encouraging, and empowering the person right in front of you. In fact, according to Gilligan (1982), ethical

decision-making is “an activity of relationship, of seeing and responding to need, taking care of the world by sustaining the web of connection so that no one is left alone” (p. 62). An administrator who prefers to make decisions on an individual, case-by-case basis, rather than relying on strict compliance with the rules, might be described as coming from an ethic of care perspective.

Ethic of the profession. The most recent of the four ethics, the ethic of the profession was developed by Shapiro and Stefkovich (2000) who felt that the previous paradigms (the ethics of justice, critique, and care) were not completely helpful in making ethical decisions in educational settings. For example, while the ethic of justice touched on some types of decisions academic administrators might face, particularly those tied to the law, neither it nor the other two ethics fully addressed the complexity of decision-making within education as compared to other professions. What Shapiro and Stefkovich (2000) felt was missing was a framework that considered “those moral aspects unique to the profession” of education (p. 18). Specifically, they argued that attention had to be given to the moral imperative at the heart of educational decision-making—the idea of serving “the best interests of the student” (p. 25). They, therefore, set out a paradigm for the profession that expects its leaders to formulate and examine their own professional codes of ethics in light of individual personal codes of ethics, as well as standards set forth by the profession, and then calls on them to place students at the center of the ethical decision-making process. (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2000, p.23)

Most often, discussions of and studies about the ethic of the profession focus on the K–12 setting. However, there is reason to believe that administrators in higher education, particularly those in student-centered departments like student-affairs and intercollegiate athletics, might also invoke this ethic when describing their decision-making (Catacutan & de Guzman, 2015).

Because I was investigating if and how higher education administrators engage their ethics when making decisions, it was important to understand what those ethics might look like. A person's individual ethical philosophy may fall distinctly into one of the four ethics described above, may be a blend of two or more of the ethics, or may shift from one outlook to another depending on the situation. I also believed that it would be reflected in how administrators interpret and handle conflicting influences on their decision-making. For example, people utilizing the ethic of justice may place the law first and foremost in their decision-making. Those utilizing an ethic of care, on the other hand, may attend less to rules or laws and more to the well-being of the person or persons whom their decision affects. Although participants did not identify these specific ethics by name when describing how their personal ethics impact their decisions, their descriptions did reveal underlying beliefs or values that matched up with one or more of the ethics. In addition to a certain philosophical outlook, an individual's personal ethics also connects to their psychological moral development. That development is the focus of the next subsection.

Psychological Conceptualizations of Ethics and Decision-making

While philosophical theories on ethics tend to focus on the role of individuals in society and either the intentions behind their decisions or the consequences of their decisions, psychologists discuss decision-making in terms of the individual's internal mind and its moral development. One of the more recent, widely used psychological models for moral behavior comes from James Rest (Johnson, 2009). Working backwards from the desired outcome of moral action, Rest sought to determine "the steps that produce such behavior" (Johnson, 2009, p. 200). He identified four steps or subprocesses of moral behavior—moral sensitivity, moral judgment, moral motivation, and moral character—and "concluded that ethical action is the result of [these]

four subprocesses” (Johnson, 2009, p. 200). A person’s development within the four subprocesses determines if he/she actually takes moral action.

Much of Rest’s work is connected with another famous psychologist—Lawrence Kohlberg. For example, Rest’s description of the moral judgment process is based specifically on Kohlberg’s stages of moral development (Johnson, 2009). Kohlberg suggested that as people mature they move through various stages of moral development advancing from what he considered less sophisticated moral judgments to more sophisticated ones. Interestingly, Kohlberg associated some of the more advanced stages with certain philosophical ethical outlooks. In Stage 5 of the Kohlberg model, for example, people make decisions based on the utilitarian idea of the greatest good (Johnson, 2009). Even more advanced, according to Kohlberg, are those individuals who make it to Stage 6. These individuals concern themselves with justice and equity and make decisions based on Rawls’ concept of justice as fairness (Johnson, 2009).

Although Kohlberg is widely cited and many people subscribe to his idea of moral development, it was actually dissatisfaction with Kohlberg’s model and the ethic of justice that led psychologist Carol Gilligan to develop the ethic of care. Gilligan (1977) was distressed by the fact that women often seemed to come up short in Kohlberg’s model—not reaching the supposedly more advanced stages. “Gilligan argued that this was not evidence of the moral immaturity of women. Rather it indicated the failure of Kohlberg’s six-stage model” (Shafer-Landau, 2012, p. 275). Disregarding abstract principles and justice-for-all in favor of care and sympathy for the people with whom they are connected does not mean that women are less morally developed (Shafer-Landau, 2012). Rather, it means that as they develop they prioritize different things. The desire to highlight these other priorities as an equally valid

conceptualization of ethics is what led to the creation of the ethic of care (Shafer-Landau, 2012; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001).

It is interesting to note that it was a psychologist (Gilligan) who launched a “new movement in philosophical thinking” (Shafer-Landau, 2012, p. 274), and she is just one example of the connections between the philosophical and psychological theories on ethics. There are certainly others. These connections are why I was not trying to isolate philosophy from psychology. I did not intend to ask people to specifically identify their philosophical outlook or their psychological stage of moral development; nor did I intend to try to discern those things. Rather, I believed that these two things together form a person’s personal ethics, and I was interested in how personal ethics play into/influence administrative decision-making and how those ethics interact with other influences on decision-making.

Other Individual Influences on Decision-making

Personal ethics are not the only individual factors that might influence decision-making. Other influential individual factors could include characteristics such as race/ethnicity, gender, sexual identity, religious affiliation, and years of experience. None of my participants identified any of these characteristics as influences on their decision-making; however, these characteristics may have a more subconscious influence. Additionally other administrators in other studies might find these factors to be more salient. Future researchers may want to examine the influence of these individual characteristics on administrative decision-making.

Summary

To understand how personal ethics influence administrative decision-making, it was necessary to first define ethics, as compared to morals and values, and then examine the components of personal ethics. I assert that a person’s philosophical outlook on ethics, as

explained by the concept of the four ethics (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2000), together with their psychological moral development, form their personal ethics. While I recognize that there are other potential, individual factors that could influence decision-making, I am most interested in the ways administrators do or do not engage their personal ethics while making decisions. Additionally, I realize that individual factors like personal ethics are not the only things that can influence a person's decision-making. There are external factors as well. The next section examines some of those external influences.

External Influences on Decision-making

Individuals do not make decisions in an isolated bubble. Numerous external factors exist that can impact administrative decision-making. First of all, decisions are made within a particular setting, a unique college or university, and institutional factors such as history, mission, climate, and personnel, etc. may impact the administrators' decision-making. Other characteristics unique to the particular area or department in which the administrator operates (intercollegiate athletics or student affairs for this study) may also affect decision-making. Additional external influences on decision-making come in the form of laws, codes of conduct, and rules. In higher education, particular laws like FERPA and Title IX, along with NCAA rules, may be especially influential. The following subsections detail all of these potential external influences.

Institutional and departmental influences. One particular group of external factors relates to institutional and departmental characteristics. While institutional factors may influence administrators in both student affairs and intercollegiate athletics, there are also certain unique characteristics of both departments that may influence administrative decision-making. That is why it is important to consider the potential influence of both general institutional culture as well

as departmental factors on decision-making. The next subsections discuss institutional culture generally and then move into specific discussions about student affairs and intercollegiate athletics.

General institutional culture. Organizations, including businesses, non-profits, and higher educational institutions, all have an organizational culture. The history, “stories, beliefs, assumptions, ceremonies, and power structures” unique to that organization contribute to the culture (Johnson, 2009, p. 267). The values, norms, and ethical climate of an organization are also part of the culture (Johnson, 2009; Ortiz, O’Brien, & Martinez, 2015). For institutions of higher education, those values and norms may be based, at least in part, on factors such as the “institutional mission, history, student population, [and] geographical location” (Ortiz, O’Brien, & Martinez, 2015, p. 50). Because each institution has its own unique story and culture, what is considered acceptable behavior or a good decision at one institution might not be seen that way at another institution (Ortiz, O’Brien, & Martinez, 2015). Research suggests that organizational culture can influence the decision-making of individual members. For example, Burns (2008) found that for the community college deans and division chairs in her study, the mission of community colleges was a particularly salient influence on decision-making. However, exactly how organizational culture influences the decision-making of individual members is still unknown.

An additional complication exists with institutional culture. Even within one specific institution, different departments may have somewhat different cultures—especially in large organizations where the departments might be only loosely coupled (Scott & Davis, 2007). It is possible then that the unique culture and/or characteristics of a department could also influence an administrator’s decision-making. Given the focus of this study, it is important to examine the

specific nature of both student affairs and intercollegiate athletics and consider the unique characteristics of these departments that could potentially influence administrative decision-making. The next two subsections look specifically at those departments.

Student affairs. Since their creation, American colleges and universities have attended to more than just the academic needs of their students (Hirt, 2006). Out of necessity, the earliest college provided “housing, dining services, religious instruction, and other amenities to students” (Hirt, 2006, p. 22). During what Hirt (2006) called the “first era” of student affairs in higher education in the United States, college students were quite young; travel was difficult, and colleges were expected to provide for the spiritual, moral, and intellectual education of their students. These conditions steered many institutions toward a policy of *in loco parentis* which allowed college personnel to “act as parents to their students, to guide their growth both in the classroom and beyond” (Hirt, 2006, p. 7). Over time, increasing enrollment and shifting expectations/roles of college presidents and faculty led to hiring specific individuals who could attend to “the non-classroom experiences of students” (Hirt, 2006, p. 7).

During the twentieth century, individuals in these positions saw their roles expand. As the number and diversity of college students increased, so too did their needs, and new programs and services were added to meet those needs (Kuk, 2012). Eventually, national social movements, campus unrest, and even legal challenges by students against their institutions precipitated the demise of *in loco parentis* (Hirt, 2006; Simmons, 2012). Student affairs professionals no longer acted as parents. Instead they took on the role of service providers and began to “embrace a customer service, students-as-consumers model” (Davis, 2011 p. 86). In addition to old standards like dining and housing, student affairs administrators were and still are expected to provide

services to address the full range of students' mental, physical, and emotional needs and desires (Kuk, 2012).

While no longer expected to act *in loco parentis*, today's student affairs professionals do have something in common with their earliest predecessors. Many of the situations they deal with focus on the morality (or lack thereof) of students' behavior. Student affairs professionals are most often the people on campus who handle student judicial matters and deal with issues from academic dishonesty to campus violence (Simmons, 2012; Zdziarski & Watkins, 2015). Furthermore, student affairs personnel "are often the first responders and/or points of contact in addressing" issues such as drug and alcohol abuse or sexual assault (Kuk, 2012, p. 4). It has even been argued that some student affairs administrators take on the "undefined but significant role of *conscience of the campus*" (Simmons, 2012, p. 184). Additionally, while trying to help students make better decisions, student affairs professionals are faced with many challenging decisions themselves. For example, should an academically underprepared student be admitted just because he/she is an athlete or plays in the band or has a rich relative who attended the college? Which student should receive more financial aid—the one with the highest grades or the one with the most financial need? How can we protect the rights and physical and emotional safety of two students living in the same residence hall after one student assaults the other?

Understanding the history of student affairs as well as the complexity of the current student affairs landscape gives insight into the types and sheer number of decisions these administrators make. Often in today's world, administrators are forced to make decisions about these significant issues in the face of increasing demands for accountability and "dramatically shrinking resources" (Kuk, 2012, p. 6). Given all of the factors that could influence their decision-making and the serious and significant consequences of some of those decisions, it

seems reasonable to try to understand how student affairs administrators make decisions, if and how they engage their personal ethics during decision-making, and how they handle conflicting influences on their decision-making.

Intercollegiate athletics. Like student affairs, intercollegiate athletics departments provide for many of the out-of-classroom needs of their constituents. Some athletic departments provide specialized services for athletes including things like housing, dining, tutoring, and travel opportunities. Like student affairs administrators, athletic administrators face increased demands for accountability and often find themselves forced to justify their existence.

Despite the similarities with student affairs, there are some characteristics and issues that are unique to intercollegiate athletics. Every year well over half a million college students compete in intercollegiate athletics (Chen, 2016; National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics, 2016; National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2016c; National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2016e). At many colleges and universities, intercollegiate athletics play a pivotal role on campus. Studies suggest institutions gain money, recognition, and brand identity from their intercollegiate athletic programs (Ancil, 2009; Fisher, 2009; Harris, 2009; Suggs, 2009). Benefits to the schools may also include increased school spirit, boosts in admissions, and stronger alumni relations (Whang, 1995). Often though, universities do not reap these benefits without significantly investing in their intercollegiate athletic programs. At some institutions, the budget for intercollegiate athletics is well over \$100 million dollars a year (Berkowitz, et al., 2015). Media and merchandizing contracts can bring even more millions into the mix. For example, in 2016 Under Armour signed a 10-year, \$86 million dollar deal with University of California, Berkeley to “outfit all of its varsity sports teams as well as its recreational club

teams” (Garcia, 2016, p. 1). Staggeringly, that deal pales in comparison to the \$169 million dollar deal Nike signed with the University of Michigan (Garcia, 2016).

Not every institution reaps millions in endorsement deals or spends millions on their athletic programs. Institutions choose for themselves how much to spend, at what level of competition to participate, and with which athletic organization to affiliate. Additionally, institutions determine for themselves where athletics are housed within their organizational structure. On some campuses athletics are part of student affairs—with the athletic director reporting to a vice president of student affairs who then reports to the president. On other campuses, athletics directors might report to a vice president of finance. Still other institutions place the athletic director in a more senior level position reporting directly to the college or university president. Intercollegiate athletics are not simple, and this complexity is part of what makes athletics an excellent arena in which to examine administrative decision-making. Athletic directors are required to make decisions every day about topics such as finances, personnel, and athlete health and safety, and in each situation, they may find their personal ethics conflicting with other factors as they weigh these decisions. As is true in student affairs, while these decisions are likely influenced by institutional and departmental factors, other external factors such as laws or rules may also come into play.

Legal and policy influences. External influences on the decision-making of higher education administrators can come from many places. As already described, they may come from the institution or department in which an administrator works. However, there are also broader influences that cross departments and institutions. Some of those influences include the law, professional codes of conduct, and NCAA and other athletic rules. The next subsections describe these factors.

Laws. In addition to internal influences like personal ethics and external institutional and/or departmental factors, administrators may be influenced by laws as they make decisions. While not every decision has legal implications, college and university administrators are subject to many state and federal laws. In fact, “the legal structure under which U.S. higher education operates is quite complex . . . [in part, due to] the intricate constitutional, statutory, and common law system of law which underpins governance in this country” (Alexander & Alexander, 2011, p. 25). Some laws like Title IX and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) specifically target educational institutions while others like the Fair Housing Act or the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) apply to educational and non-educational institutions alike. Further complicating the picture is the fact that some laws, like the First Amendment, apply differently depending on whether an institution is public or private while others like Title IX, the ADA, and FERPA apply uniformly across institution types. Therefore, an important responsibility of higher education administrators is understanding the laws that apply to their specific institution type and their specific programs. Theoretically, those laws and their consequences should/could influence the decision-making of administrators.

One law in particular may influence the decision-making of administrators in both student affairs and athletics. As part of the Educational Amendment of 1972, Title IX “prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in any education program or activity that receives federal financial assistance” (Alexander & Alexander, 2011, p. 484). Originally narrowly interpreted to apply to specific programs within institutions, the law now applies to educational institutions as a whole and is intended to prevent sexual discrimination in those settings (Alexander & Alexander, 2011). Perhaps the two most common applications of Title IX relate to equal opportunities in intercollegiate athletics and sexual harassment/sexual assault on campus. Early Title IX lawsuits

targeted intercollegiate athletic and compelled athletic departments to modify, among other things, their sports offerings and the funding of those sports so they would be gender equitable (Lieberwitz, et al., 2016). More recently, Title IX enforcement has focused on institutions' handling of sexual harassment/sexual assault cases (Lieberwitz, et al., 2016), and on many campuses, the student affairs administrators are the ones responsible for dealing with those cases (Simmons, 2012; Zdziarski & Watkins, 2015). While the focus may be different across the two settings, both athletic administrators and student affairs administrators could face serious consequences if any of their decisions violate Title IX.

Codes of conduct. In addition to laws like Title IX, other outside factors may influence administrative decision-making. Professional codes are one of those other factors. Many professions issue codes of conduct and/or ethical guidelines, and student affairs and athletics are no exception (ACPA-College Student Educators International, nd; NASPA, 2016). For example, ACPA-College Student Educators International, one of the larger professional associations for student affairs professionals, publishes a seven-page “Statement of Ethical Principles and Standards” meant to “assist student affairs professionals . . . in regulating their own behavior by sensitizing them to potential ethical problems and by providing standards useful in daily practice” (ACPA: College Student Educators International, nd, p. 1). Some practitioners suggest that for new professionals in the field these codes or guidelines serve as “guideposts in developing their professional ethics” (Ortiz, O’Brien, & Martinez, 2015, p. 45). However, others argue that professional codes of ethics are “too vague to be useful,” that they are not “widely distributed or read,” that they are “hard to apply across cultures or in different situations,” and that “they lack adequate enforcement provisions” (Johnson, 2009, p. 282). Research suggests that what student affairs practitioners believe they should do in work situations frequently matched

up with what the APCA codes encourages them to do (Busher, 1996). However, discrepancies exist between what practitioners know they should do and what they say they would do in many situations (Busher, 1996). Furthermore, what they say they would do does not always match with the APCA code (Busher, 1996). The question then is: what might cause student affairs professionals to act in a manner different from what their code suggests? Are there factors, other than their code of conduct, that have greater influence on or a higher priority in their decision-making?

NCAA and additional athletic rules. Just as there are codes of conduct for student-affairs professionals, there are codes of conduct for coaches and athletic administrators as well. However, there is an additional factor in athletics that is likely even more influential on the decision-making process—the rules of the athletic governing body to which the institution belongs. Almost every college or university that supports intercollegiate athletics belongs to a conference and/or national governing organization. The three largest national collegiate athletic organizations are the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIAA), and the National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA). Over 2000 institutions hold membership in one of these organizations (National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics, 2016; National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2016d; National Junior College Athletic Association, 2016). Organizations such as these set out policies and rules for member institutions on a wide range of topics such as recruiting, scholarships, scheduling, and student-athlete conduct. Unlike professional codes of ethics, these rules have specific consequences for non-compliance. While not technically law, these rules and the consequences that result from violating them can have very serious implications on an institution and its athletic department.

Perhaps not surprising, the NCAA sets different rules for its member institutions than the NJCAA or NAIA set for theirs. However, even within a single organization like the NCAA, there can be different rules for different institutions based on the level or division in which the institutions participate. For example, within the NCAA there are three divisions. While some NCAA rules apply to institutions and athletes in all divisions (drug use, for example, is prohibited for all athletes), each division has its own unique rules particularly with respect to how student-athletes are recruited and funded. According to the NCAA, “[t]he differences among the divisions emerge primarily in how schools choose to fund their athletics programs and in the national attention they command” (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2016a). Specifically, Division I institutions are permitted to offer “full-ride” scholarships to student-athletes to cover the full cost of their tuition, room and board (although not every Division I athlete receives scholarship money). Division II institutions can offer partial athletic scholarships, and Division III institutions are not permitted to offer any athletic scholarships (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2016d).

Comprised of 307 institutions, Division II is the smallest of the three divisions, and yet it represents an extremely wide range of institutional diversity. There are public and private institutions with enrollments ranging “from more than 25,000 to less than 2,500” (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2016a). Additionally, “the division also expands its membership into Canada with the NCAA’s only international member institution, Simon Fraser University, and features three schools located in Puerto Rico” (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2016a). Despite their differences, all of these institutions have taken a similar approach to intercollegiate athletics. When compared to Division I institutions, “institutions in Division II generally don’t have the financial resources to devote to their athletics programs or choose not to

place such a heavy financial emphasis on them” (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2016a). Instead they opt for

the partial-scholarship model [which] allows Division II schools to recognize student-athletes for their skills through athletics-based aid, while at the same time keeping athletics budgets more in line with the institution’s bottom line. It costs Division II schools about half as much to sponsor a competitive athletics program as it does in Division I. (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2016b)

This budgetary balancing act along with the institutional diversity they represent makes Division II institutions a particularly appealing group to study.

In addition to belonging to a large national organization like the NCAA, most schools also belong to a particular conference. The conference represents the other schools against which an institution most often competes. Historically, conferences were often built on geographic convenience or a shared institutional, ideological stance. However, in recent years, money and television exposure have caused shifts in conferences across the country. No matter the reason for a particular affiliation, once colleges or universities join a conference, they are bound to follow the conference rules in addition to national rules. Typically, conference rules complement national rules and focus more on logistics such as how the host of the annual conference tournament in a particular sport will be decided.

Regardless of which organization issues the rules, these rules likely influence the day-to-day decision-making of athletic administration. The interesting questions for me relate to how these rules are prioritized against other factors that can influence decision-making, and what happens when an administrator’s personal ethics, or other influential factors, conflict with the

rules. The incident described in Chapter 1 with the president bailing the student-athlete out of jail is a perfect example of the type of conflict I wanted to know more about.

Summary. Whether it is NCAA or conference rules, professional codes of conduct, or institutional or departmental culture, many external factors can influence administrative decision-making in higher education in student affairs and intercollegiate athletics. The factors mentioned here are not the only possible external factors that might be influential; however, I believe they may be some of the most salient. Two goals of my research were to discover what factors, both internal and external, influence higher education administrators' decision-making and how administrators handle conflicts between the factors like personal ethics. I believe that which factor wins in a conflict—in other words, which factor is prioritized—may be decision-specific which leads to the next category of influences on decision-making, those that are decision-specific.

Decision-specific Influences on Decision-making

Thus far, I discussed the internal and external influences on the decision-making of higher education administrators. Much of the research on ethical decision-making focuses on these types of factors (Singer & Singer, 1997). However, there is an additional category of factors that must be considered as well, and those are the decision-specific factors. Decision-specific factors are what make each decision-making opportunity unique, and they have to do with the nature of the decision itself. Theorists and researchers interested in the nature of each decision tend to focus on the anticipated outcomes of decisions and the ramifications of those outcomes. For example, Collins (1989) was concerned with the nature of the harm (physical, economic, or psychological) that might result from a decision and the impact of that potential

harm on decision-making. Also interested in the nature of the decision being considered, Jones (1991) examined the impact of the moral intensity of the decision and its consequences.

Dissatisfied because “[e]xisting theoretical models of individual ethical decision making in organizations place little or no emphasis on characteristics of the ethical issue itself,” Jones created his own framework (1991, p. 366). Specifically, he was interested in the unique moral aspects of the particular decision itself, and in what he called moral intensity. As Jones (1991) defined it, “moral intensity is a construct that captures the extent of issue-related moral imperative in a situation” (p. 372).

To get a complete picture of that construct, he identified six components of moral intensity—“magnitude of consequences, social consensus, probability of effect, temporal immediacy, proximity, and concentration of effect”—that he believed impact ethical decision-making (p. 372). Jones (1991) defined magnitude of consequences as “the sum of the harm (or benefits) . . . to victims (or beneficiaries)” (p. 374). For example, will ten people be harmed or 100? Will someone die or only be injured? The second component of moral intensity, social consensus, is the “degree of social agreement that a proposed act is evil (or good)” (Jones, 1991, p. 375). In other words, how will others feel about the action? Third is probability of effect which means how likely is it that the consequence of the decision will actually happen and how likely is it that the predicted harm or benefit of that consequence will occur. The fourth component is temporal immediacy—“the length of time between the present and the onset of consequences of the moral act in question” (Jones, 199, p. 376). Proximity, the fifth component, has to do with the sense of nearness the decision-maker feels for those who will be impacted by the consequences of the decision. For example, an administrator may hesitate to cut programs on the main campus because he/she feels more proximity with the students and faculty at that

campus, but be willing to cut programs at a satellite campus because he/she feels less proximity to those students and faculty. The sixth, and final component, concentration of effect “is an inverse function of the number of people affected” by a certain consequence. In other words, people are more willing to accept a decision that would cost a big corporation a lot of money, but they would not want to see one person lose their life-savings. Overall, I believe that all six components of moral intensity have the possibility to influence the decision-making of educational administrators, either consciously or unconsciously, and impact the ways in which they engage their personal ethics when making decisions. While certain components of moral intensity may be more salient than others to decisions made by higher education administrators, overall it is a very appropriate framework because it provides a way to understand how/why specific details of a situation might influence administrative decision-making.

Summary

Decision-making is a complex phenomenon with many moving pieces. Conceptually, it makes sense that many factors like personal ethics, institutional and departmental culture, laws, policies, rules, and the moral intensity of the decision and its consequences could influence the decision-maker. Providing a more thorough picture of each of the factors individually was the goal of this section of Chapter 2. However without empirical research, any thoughts about how these factors might influence a decision-maker are all purely hypothetical. That is why it is important to look to the small body of research that examines ethics and decision-making in an educational setting.

Empirical Research on Ethics and Decision-making in Education

Research on ethics and decision-making in education seems to fall into a few categories. Much of what is available comes from articles that offer theoretical frameworks or guidelines for

ethical decision-making. While they describe what administrators should do or what they should focus on as they make decisions, these frameworks do not tell us how administrators actually make decisions, what they really consider during the process, how they handle conflicting influences on the decision-making process, or how they engage their personal ethics during the process. For that we must look to the studies about the decision-making of educational administrators. While these studies primarily concentrated on K–12 administrators, they are still helpful in trying to understand this complex process. Fewer studies focused on decision-making by college or university administrators, but there have been some including a small subset about decisions made regarding intercollegiate athletics. The following subsections of this chapter provide a review of the frameworks for administrative decision-making as well as studies that have examined these concepts.

Frameworks for Decision-making

In higher education, as in business, frameworks (also called paradigms or guidelines) related to administrative ethical decision-making are much easier to come by than actual empirical research. While they do not provide empirical data on the decisions being made by educational administrators, the frameworks do reflect a concern about ethical decision-making in the field of education. In fact, the author of one such framework, James Counelis, pursued his work “after a continuing stream of disturbing reports” of unethical decision-making in higher education led him “to seek empirical studies on the moral behavior of those who comprise the American university community” (Counelis, 1993, p.75). Finding virtually no such studies, Counelis instead translated research conducted in the business world into a higher education setting and developed some suggested interventions for higher education administrators. Like Counelis, other authors also developed frameworks for what educational administrators should

do or what they should focus on as they make decisions (Curren, 2008; Oliver & Hioco, 2012; Wood & Hilton, 2012). These frameworks draw not only from authors and ideas within the four ethics described above, but also from other more general frameworks for ethical decision-making like Kidder's "Ethical Checkpoints," Nash's "12 Questions," or Fisher's six-step model (Johnson, 2009; Oliver & Hioco, 2012). Curren, for example, developed what he calls a "comprehensive ethic of academic administration" (2008, p. 337). Drawing from the teachings of Aristotle, Curren lays out three cardinal virtues: "commitment to the good of the institution; good administrative judgment, and conscientiousness in discharging the duties of the office" (p. 337), and asserts that by sticking to these virtues an administrator will make good decisions. Oliver and Hioco (2012) created their "ethical decision-making framework for community college administrators" by adapting Fisher's six-step model for critical thinking and decision-making into a nine question, sequential worksheet/chart. Administrators are supposed to work their way down the chart by asking themselves each of the questions. Unfortunately, providing a list of questions administrators should ask themselves or a list of virtues they should use to guide their decision-making does not tell us how administrators actually make their decisions. It simply provides administrators something else to consider in addition to institutional policies or professional codes of conduct. Although Oliver and Hioco (2012) argue that frameworks "provide a systematic and reflective approach to decision-making" (p.251), I assert they may actually contribute to an over-simplification of the decision-making process. Implying that decisions can be made by going down a checklist or a list of questions suggests all decisions are straight forward and the same. The limited empirical research on the decision-making by educational administrators suggests the opposite—that decision-making is a complex process rife with conflict. The next subsection focuses on that research.

Studies on Administrative Decision-making in Education

As mentioned, most of the research about ethics and administrative decision-making in education has focused on the K–12 setting. While there are certainly differences between K–12 and higher education, there are also many similarities. Most relevant here is the fact that administrators at both levels must make decisions about issues such as budgets, curriculum, student and faculty conduct and performance, and politics. Because the quantity of K–12 research far exceeds that which is focused on higher education, I talk about both concurrently, making note of higher education studies as they arise. Specifically, I discuss what research tells us about the complexity of administrative decision-making and the conflicts that may arise when numerous, influential factors must be considered during decision-making.

Complexity. Despite what the decision-making frameworks seem to imply, common sense and research tell us that within education “there is very little simplicity, stability, or clarity in . . . administrative decision making” (Barlosky, 1995, p. 446). Rather, decision-making within educational administration is a complicated process situated in a complex environment. Over 30 years ago, Ashbaugh and Kasten (1984) tried to paint a picture of this complexity by describing education as a world in which “[d]ifferent generations confront one another; racial, ethnic, and religious groups are intermingled; and stakeholders disagree about desirable policies, procedures, and outcomes” (p. 195). Twenty years later, Dempster and Berry (2003) concurred with the description but argued that recent, broader societal changes imposed new levels of “immediacy and complexity” onto the decision-making of educational administrators (p. 458). While these researchers specifically talked about K–12 education, their points apply to higher education as well. Furthermore, as articulated in previous subsections, there are also additional intricacies and

complexities that apply to the decisions that higher education administrators in student affairs and athletics administrators must make.

One way researchers have tried to better understand the complexity of decision-making in an educational setting is by having administrators (mostly principals) describe challenging decisions they made and then categorizing/typologizing those decisions (e.g., Ashbaugh & Kasten, 1984; Cranston, Enrich, & Kimber, 2006; Dempster & Berry, 2003; Mueller, 2008; Walker & Shakoto, 1999). Per these researchers, administrators indicated that most of their complex decisions are either teacher/employee related, student related, or externally related. Two other minor categories also emerged—curriculum/instruction and finance. More recently, one of the rare studies to look at higher education administrators also began by categorizing the challenging decisions discussed by participants (Catacutan & de Guzman, 2015). Catacutan and de Guzman (2015) found that for their group of college deans in the Philippines challenging decisions centered around faculty conduct and discipline, student conduct and discipline, and academic performance of students. They also categorized the decisions based on which of the four ethics the administrator utilized to make the decision. Although categorizing decisions can be an important first step in understanding decision-making, the goal of my research is to move beyond this categorization and instead analyze the factors influencing the decisions.

While decision-making in intercollegiate athletics has been the subject of a handful of studies (Auerbach, 2008; Covell & Barr, 2001; Hirko, 2011; Quarterman, Dupree, & Willis, 2006; Ward, 2011; Williams & Pennington, 2006), not one of these scholars ever mentioned the issue of ethics, even while their studies highlighted the complexity of decision-making and revealed certain factors worth considering. For example, in examining college presidents' perceptions of athletics, Williams and Pennington (2006) found that 64% of respondents felt that

“the budget for athletics is not well understood by college leaders” (p.97). Arguably a lack of knowledge/understanding regarding athletic budgets could influence decisions made about intercollegiate athletics. Auerbach (2008) and Hirko (2011) also demonstrated the complexity of decision-making in intercollegiate athletics in their analysis of the many external factors that influence decision-making in athletics. Respectively, these scholars examined the role of stakeholders in athletics-related decision-making (Hirko, 2011) and the influence of institutional factors such as economics, branding and identity academic quality, and governance and institution culture, on presidential decision-making (Auerbach, 2008).

Conflict. While recognizing that administrators face complex decisions is helpful, knowing what makes the decisions complicated is arguably more important. Much of the research suggests that the complexity stems from the conflicting factors administrators must weigh as they make decisions and how they deal with those conflicts. Specifically, researchers (Ashbaugh & Kasten, 1984; Busher, 1996; Cranston, Enrich, & Kimber, 2006; Frick, 2009; Walker & Shakato, 1999) have focused on conflicts between individual administrators’ personal ethics and the “values, expectations, and guidelines of an organization and/or profession” (Frick, 2009, p. 53). For example, for administrators in a 2006 study by Cranston, Enrich, and Kimber, “[p]roblems occurred when there was a clash between the personal values . . . professional ethics [and] . . . the institutional structures and the organisational [sic] culture of the school” (p .11). Frick (2009) even argues that

[n]egotiating value incongruity both within the school organization, and equally as important, within oneself, and the decisions that follow is part of the work of leadership. In fact, it can be claimed that either a congruency or “clash” of personal and

organizational/professional values, and the administrative decisions that follow, is the heart of ethical leadership in schools. (p. 54)

I strongly agree with the point made by Frick and others that there are likely points during the decision-making process when personal ethics conflict with the other factors, like policies or codes, that also influence the decision. This idea of conflicting influences on decision-making is at the very heart of my research questions. However, what seems to be missing from the existing research is an acknowledgement that conflict could arise between personal ethics and other external factors besides institutional policy or professional code. I argue that there may also be conflicts between personal ethics and things like state and/or federal laws or non-institutional (NCAA) rules. Additionally, I believe there is the potential for the conflicts to vary depending on the nature of the decision which is why I include Jones' moral intensity frameworks within my theoretical frameworks.

Theoretical Frameworks

To begin, I believe Jones' (1991) concept of moral intensity as described above is very useful in framing this study. Jones conceptualized moral intensity by identifying six specific aspects: magnitude of consequences, social consensus, probability of effect, temporal immediacy, proximity, and concentration of effect. Interestingly, Jones' framework has been used to guide a significant amount of research about decision-making in the field of business including the works of Weber (1996), Harrington (1997), and Paolillo and Vitell (2002), all of which found that moral intensity (or some component of it) significantly influenced ethical decision-making. I was interested to see what can be found in the world of higher education. For example, while I believe that the impact of social consensus, proximity, and concentration of effect could be limited by the fact that most administrators are making decisions within and for

their specific institution, I feel that the perceived magnitude of consequences of a decision and the perceived temporal immediacy of the consequences of the decision could impact decision making in both student affairs and in athletics. I added the word “perceived” to these concepts because I argue that it is the decision-makers’ perception of how and when the consequences might occur that is important. I was also curious about whether or not these perceptions in some way influence or interact with the decision-makers’ personal ethics and the other factors described above. For example, while not intending to ask this question explicitly, I wondered if an administrator might shift from an ethic of justice to an ethic of care if he/she perceives the magnitude of consequences of the decision to be small or if he/she might prioritize the law more highly in decisions for which the magnitude of consequences is perceived to be larger.

To answer those questions, it felt necessary to utilize another theoretical framework—the idea of the four ethics, and specifically the multi-paradigm approach to the four ethics advocated by Shapiro and Stefkovich (2000). As indicated, the four ethics are a way to describe a person’s philosophical outlook on ethics. A person may approach a problem from the ethic of justice, the ethic of critique, the ethic of care, or the ethic of the profession, or from some combination of the four. Shapiro and Stefkovich (2000) advise and encourage educational administrators to utilize a combination of the four ethics to make decisions, rather than just focusing on one of the ethics, and it seemed quite possible that my participants’ comments might reflect this multi-paradigm approach. Having an understanding of all four ethics and the ways they can be utilized together assisted me in processing the information participants provided about their perceptions and interpretations of their personal ethics and the role ethics plays in their decision-making.

It is important to note, though, that most people do not talk about their decision-making by saying “I utilized an ethic of justice” or “I approached this situation from an ethic of care

standpoint.” Furthermore, most people are not even specifically aware of what the four ethics are or what they mean; therefore, I did not ask participants explicit questions about them. Rather, by asking participants about the factors that influence their decision-making, which factors they prioritize, how they define personal ethics, etc., I was able to identify which ethic or ethics, if any, were guiding their decision-making. For example, a participant who talked mostly about following rules and laws might be predominantly influenced by the ethic of justice whereas someone who focused on building a relationship with the person impacted by their decision might be driven by an ethic of care.

Overall, I believe the multi-paradigm approach to the four ethics (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2000) and Jones’ (1991) concept of moral intensity to be most useful in framing my inquiry. They are clear, contemporary, and highly relevant to decisions made within higher education. Also, I believe there is much to explore regarding the application of these frameworks to the decision-making of higher education administrators, particularly when the decisions in question relate to student affairs and/or intercollegiate athletics. While I did not ask about either framework in any explicit way during the interviews, I believe insight about the four ethics (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2000) and moral intensity (Jones, 1991) informed my study design and my interview questions and allowed me to dig deeper in my analyses.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design of a study encompasses a great deal of information. This chapter includes information about my methodological approach as well as my philosophical outlook. Additionally, I detail my participant and site selection decisions, my data collection and data analysis procedures, the validity and reliability of the study, and the study limitations.

Methodological Approach

As described in Chapter 2, empirical research on ethical decision-making in higher education is scarce. According to Creswell (2014), “if a concept or phenomenon needs to be explored and understood because little research has been done on it, then it merits a qualitative approach” (p. 20). Additionally, Merriam (2014) argues that the purpose of qualitative research is to “understand how people make sense of their lives and their experiences” (p. 23). The goal of this study was to better understand how higher education administrators in student affairs and intercollegiate athletics understand the factors that influence their decision-making and the role their personal ethics play in that decision-making. This goal combined with the lack of research on my topic made qualitative methods incredibly appropriate for this study. The next step then was to choose the appropriate, specific qualitative method to utilize to answer my research questions. Those questions were:

1. What factors influence the decision-making of higher education administrators in student affairs and intercollegiate athletics?
2. How do they handle conflicts between the factors that influence decision-making?
3. Do/how do higher education administrators in student affairs and athletics engage their personal ethics during the decision-making process?

After considering my research questions, my intended participants, and the various qualitative methods available, I determined that general (basic) qualitative inquiry was the best option. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) identified six common qualitative research designs: basic qualitative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, narrative analysis, and qualitative case study. While the desire to understand how people make meaning of their experiences can underlie any of these designs, the latter five each have a unique additional aspect not present in basic inquiry. For example, an ethnography looks at “the interaction of individuals not just with others, but also with the culture of the society in which they live,” and “[a] grounded theory seeks not just to understand but to build a substantive theory about the phenomenon of interest” (Merriam & Tisdell, 201, p. 24). These methodologies were not an appropriate fit for my research question. Neither were phenomenology, narrative analysis, or case study. What remained was basic qualitative inquiry, which is “probably the most common form of research found in education” (Merriam & Tisdell, 201, p. 24). In basic qualitative inquiry, “data are collected through interviews, observations, or document analysis” (Merriam & Tisdell, 201, p. 24). I chose interviews as my approach to understanding administrative decision-making in higher education because interviews offered the greatest opportunity to get detailed, individualized responses generated by the participants. Observations or a survey would not have provided the same level of detail or individualization.

Philosophical Outlook and Positionality

Philosophically, I approached this study from a constructivist viewpoint. The goal of constructivist research is to seek an understanding of the complex meanings individuals construct regarding their own experiences (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Furthermore, the constructivist researcher strives to “rely as much as possible on the participants’ views of the

situation being studied” (Creswell, 2014, p. 8). In other words, in this study participants told their own story and made meaning of their own experiences. No one else besides the administrators themselves could have told me how they prioritized various factors that influenced their decision or how they managed conflicts between factors during the decision-making process. It was their perceptions of their decision-making process that were most important, and interviews seemed like the most appropriate and thorough way to obtain the information.

In addition to fitting my general research interests and the specific research questions in this study, qualitative research conducted from a constructivist viewpoint resonates with me on more personal levels. I believe the best way to understand an event or experience is through the interpretation of those who lived it; I am an interpretivist with a preference for qualitative methods. I use qualitative research in a contextual manner to attempt to discern what meaning the participants attach to events or experiences. Part of the reason I place so much value on interpretation is the subject matter – people. It is not atoms under a microscope. Atoms all react the same way to something. People do not. (That is why they say eye witnesses are so unreliable. Everyone sees things different. An experience that one person thinks is fantastic; someone else may find awful.) Also, I am a former English teacher who likes language, words, and storytelling. There is a richness to these methods that allows me to explore those interests as well.

My background and career path are connected to this study in ways that extend well beyond a love of language and an inclination toward qualitative research. After being a high school English teacher and part-time college coach for four years, I decided to move into college coaching full-time. For six years I coached woman’s softball and tennis, first at a community college and then at a small Division III liberal arts college. Eventually, I had the opportunity to move into an administrative position becoming the Athletic Director and Assistant Dean of

students at a community college. In this role, I dealt with many tough decisions including how to handle inappropriate behavior by a coach and how to handle a serious mental health issue of a student-athlete. I also faced decisions very similar to those detailed by the administrators in this study—including what to do about a violation of athletic rules, how to deal with transferring student-athletes, how to enforce rules that had historically been ignored, how to mitigate the impact of limited financial resources on the student-athlete experience, how to codify procedures and policies that had not been properly documents, and whether or not to approve a certain project/program that a student wanted to organize.

I was in my role of Athletic Director/Assistant Dean of Students at the time of the Penn State scandal, and it sickened me. It made me question how anyone in education could cover-up something like that. I knew I had certain beliefs that would have led me to make very different decisions than the Penn State administrators, but I did not know what they were thinking or how/why they made the decisions they did. Eventually those questions led to others that became the focus of my research. In general, how do administrators make decisions? Specifically, what factors influence their decision-making, how do they handle conflicts between those factors, and what role, if any, does personal ethics play in that decision-making? Penn State was not the first scandal in higher education, and unfortunately it was not the last. It was important to me to try to understand how education administrators make decisions. If we understand what factors are influencing their decisions, we might eventually understand how certain decisions can lead to scandal and tragedy, and then perhaps we could learn how to prevent future tragedies.

Site Selection

For a variety of reasons, site selection for this study was intentional. First, because regulations (laws, rules, and policies) can potentially influence decision-making, I wanted to

know, as much as possible, that the specific regulations being considered by the administrators in this study were the same. While most U.S. colleges and universities, public and private, are subject to federal laws such as Title IX and FERPA, choosing only public institutions meant that those laws would, in the eyes of the courts and perhaps the administrators, be interpreted and enforced in similar ways for all of the chosen institutions. Furthermore, choosing institutions within one state ensured they were also all subject to the same state laws. If one participant mentioned the influence of a specific law on a particular decision and another participant talked about a similar decision but did not mention the state law, I wanted to be able to consider possible explanations for the differing influences beyond simply: A) the participants work in different states and do not have the same laws; or B) one participant works at a public university and one works at a private university so the law applies differently to each. Similarly, ensuring that the institutions were subject to the same rules for athletics was important. Therefore, all of the institutions were NCAA members and participated at the Division II level for the great majority of their sports. (Several institutions had one sport that played at another level.) Additionally, all of the institutions were part of the same athletic conference, thus holding even more of the potential external influences on decision-making consistent. I knew coming into the study that I would ask participants to react to a case study related to intercollegiate athletics that included a rule violation. Knowing that it was a rule violation for **all** of my participants, I could then consider the influence of rules on their decision making in a more uniform way. From the potential sites in the pool (same state, same NCAA Division, same conference), I chose three geographically convenient institutions. All three were comprehensive universities, sometimes called regional public universities; these are institutions that focus on “undergraduates and master’s students and . . . have few, if any, PhD programs” (Olwell, 2011, para. 2). Regional,

comprehensive universities are quite common at the NCAA Division II level; therefore, it was not surprising that the three institutions selected as sites identify as such.

The selection of Division II universities was intentional beyond wanting institutions that compete at the same level. As described in Chapter 2, Division II includes a diverse mix of institutions, and their programs face many of the same complex issues faced by Division I programs. However, the Division II programs do not garner the same reputation and renown as big Division I programs thus allowing for a greater level of accessibility. I had no problem getting Division II athletic administrators to speak with me. I imagine it would have been much more difficult to get time with their Division I counterparts.

Participant Selection

As is often the case with qualitative research, the sample for this study was a purposeful sample (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Two groups of higher education administrators at three NCAA Division II institutions within the same state were chosen for this study—administrators in athletics and those in student affairs. Specifically, the highest-ranking administrator in each of those areas at each institution was asked to participate. For athletics, that administrator was the athletic director. Using institutional organizational charts, I then selected the comparable, corresponding administrator from within student affairs, corresponding in terms of level of report/position within the hierarchy. Typically, this person held a title like vice president of student affairs, although sometimes the comparable person was an associate vice president of student affairs/dean of students. I also selected a subordinate (or two) of each of the original individuals. These subordinates had titles such as associate athletic director, dean, and director of student activities. Originally, 18 potential study participants were contacted, and nine of those administrators agreed to participate. Several of the nine participants were asked if they knew of

other student affairs or athletic administrators who might be interested in participating. This snowball sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) identified two additional participants for a total of eleven. Of those eleven, five work in athletics; six work in student affairs. Three of the participants are men; eight are women. Two are African-American; nine are White. Overall, participants averaged 17 years working in Higher Education, 19.5 years on average for those in student affairs, and 15 years on average for those in athletics. Some participants had only been an administrator for four or five years, but they had extensive experience either in student affairs or collegiate coaching. Other participants had been an actual administrator for much longer (over 15 years in several cases).

Pseudonym	Institution	Department	Gender	Race
Anna	1	Student Affairs	Female	White
Beth	1	Athletics	Female	White
Chad	1	Athletics	Male	White
Diane	1	Student Affairs	Female	White
Eileen	1	Student Affairs	Female	White
Gina	2	Student Affairs	Female	White
Helen	2	Athletics	Female	White
Irv	2	Student Affairs	Male	White
Randall	3	Student Affairs	Male	African-American
Sharon	3	Athletics	Female	White
Tara	3	Athletics	Female	African-American

Table 1. Participant details

Data Collection

Before data collection occurred, I secured IRB approval from Michigan State University. After approval, a pilot study was conducted with five volunteers. All of the volunteers were doctoral students in a Higher Education Administration PhD program, and all of them had

previous higher education administration experience (predominantly but not exclusively in student affairs). Semi-structured interviews (open ended questions with semi-structured prompts) were conducted with each of the five pilot participants. This type of interview was most appropriate for this study as it provided some structure while allowing me the flexibility to “respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 111). Careful crafting, review, and revision of the interview questions took place prior to, during, and after the pilot interview phase of the study (see Appendix A for the interview protocol and questions).

In addition to the interview protocol, I created a hands-on, manipulative tool based on the literature and on my own ideas about decision-making to facilitate discussion during the interviews. As I engaged with the literature, I created models for myself so I could visualize the ways that ethics and all the other factors interacted during the decision-making process. Talking with my advisor about the third draft of the model, which was the first to include a funnel, I was explaining how the different factors might move around, and she said, “wouldn’t it be great if the participants could do that?” I took her question and ran with it, adapting my model into a hands-on tool. The tool consisted of a picture of a funnel, blank cut-out circles on which the participants wrote, and eight pre-printed circles, each with a potential influence on decision-making written on it. The pre-printed influences were based on factors described in my literature review and included personal ethics, institutional context, departmental context, laws, media/social media/public opinion, professional code of conduct, past education and training, and NCAA rules (see Appendix B for the manipulative). The exact usage of this tool within the interviews is detailed later in this section.

While the tool itself is an original creation, I am not the first researcher to utilize visual and/or hands-on activities to facilitate interviews. For example, some researchers use a technique called photo elicitation whereby they begin an interview by having the participant look at and respond to photographs related to the topic of the interview (Harper, 2002; Rouse, 2014). Proponents of the technique argue that use of photo elicitation in interviews “prompted memory, reduced misunderstandings and elicited higher quality and more comprehensive interviews” (Rouse, 2014, para. 3). An even more hands-on approach relates to drawing. Mental health practitioners and researchers sometimes have patients, particularly children, draw as a part of interviews (Khorshidi & Mohammadipour, 2016; Ogina, 2012). Drawing is seen as a less threatening way to broach sensitive topics, and it provides the drawer a safer, more objective way to view themselves and the topic “as opposed to direct examination that may produce initial defensiveness and guardedness (Oster & Crone, 2004, p. 3). I believe my hands-on tool had a similar effect as photo elicitation and drawing. First, it provided a safer, more comfortable way to ease into a discussion about ethics and decision-making. Had I started with direct questions on the topic, I believe participants would have been more guarded or defensive. I also believe the tool prompted memory and elicited higher quality, more detailed responses from participants and gave them a more concrete way to visual the somewhat abstract concept of decision-making.

Originally, I envisioned conducting two separate 1-hour interviews with each participant. The first would have focused on participants discussing their tough decision and using the funnel tool to detail the factors that influenced that decision. They then would have been asked to discuss how they prioritized those factors, how they handled conflicts with the factors, etc. A second interview would have focused on reactions to two case studies. For ease of scheduling, pilot participants agreed to do both parts of their interview in one sitting. As it turned out, the

two interviews together only took about 90 minutes with each pilot participant. Additionally, having the funnel out and on the table during the second part of the interview proved helpful and interesting. Attempting to recreate what they had in the funnel at the time of a second, separate interview would have been difficult at best and might have resulted in participants forgetting some of what they said in the first interview. Therefore, the decision was made to conduct just one interview with each participant during the actual study.

For the actual study, one semi-structured, approximately 90-minutes long interview was conducted with each of the eleven participants. The interviews were face-to-face, one-on-one, and conducted at a location of the participant's choosing, in most cases their office. Each interview was audio recorded with participants' permission. I also took notes during the interview. In particular, any time a participant pointed to a specific circle or circles in their funnel and said something like "this was a big influence," I made sure to note the time index and which factor or factors they pointed out. Taking this step allowed me to know for sure what "this" meant as I was listening to recording and reading through transcripts.

At the beginning of each interview, each participant was asked to briefly describe their role at the institution and the educational path that got them there. These questions were asked as a way to make participants comfortable and to get them talking. After a brief conversation about their position and responsibilities, participants were asked to think of and then describe a tough work-related decision they had to make that affected a student or students.

Next, they were given the funnel and the blank circles. They were asked to write down all of the factors that influenced their decision-making in this specific case. After they finished writing, they were asked to pick up each circle, say what was written on it, and describe the ways that factor influenced the decision. Then they were asked to place the circle into the funnel. After

every circle was described and placed in the funnel, the participants answered questions about the order in which the factors influenced the decision and the weight each factor had in influencing the decision. They were then asked to arrange the circles in the funnel with respect to that weight. The factors that weighed heaviest on the decision were placed at the bottom of the funnel and those that were least influential were placed at the top. At this point I took a picture of their funnel (see Appendix D for photos). Throughout the rest of this dissertation, this decision is referred to as their *funnel decision*. The term *funnel decision* and any specific words or phrases from the circles are in italics for clarity.

Next, I explained that I had some preprinted circles with factors that potentially influence decision-making in some situations. I laid out all eight preprinted circles and asked participants to read through them, pick up and talk about any of these factors that they felt played into the decision they just described, and place those circles in their funnel. Some participants talked about all of the preprinted factors, but then only put in their funnel the ones they felt influenced their decision. Finally, they were asked to do any reorganization they wanted so that the factors that weighed heaviest, whether original or preprinted, were again at the bottom of the funnel. I took a second picture of the funnel at this point (again see Appendix D for photos). Table 2 includes a description of each participants' *funnel decision*, along with some of the factors they said influenced their decision.

Pseudonym	Brief summary of <i>funnel decisions</i> and influential factors
Anna	She talked about her decision to dismiss a student after a conduct appeal. Influential factors included, among other things, <i>campus safety</i> , <i>student developmental issues</i> , and <i>process</i> .
Beth	She talked about her decision to report her institution for an NCAA rules violation that involved an ineligible athlete being allowed to practice. Influential factors included, among other things, <i>relationships</i> , <i>impact on student-athletes future</i> , and <i>her ability to do her job</i> .

Table 2. Brief summary of *funnel decisions* and influential factors

Table 2 (cont'd).

Pseudonym	Brief summary of <i>funnel decisions</i> and influential factors
Chad	He talked about issue of bad fan behavior at hockey games and his decision to push back when his boss told him it was his job to correct the behavior. Influential factors included, among other things, <i>season ticket holders</i> and other groups of people, as well as professional identity related factors.
Diane	She talked about her decision to eliminate a night from the shuttle service that her institution ran for students from campus to the downtown area. Influential factors included, among other things, <i>student use, cost, history, and politics</i> .
Eileen	She talked about her decisions related to handling a \$2 million dollar shortfall in the university budget that resulted from the state government's capping of a specific student aid program. Influential factors included, among other things, the <i>timing</i> of events, <i>communication difficulties</i> , and <i>enrollment pressures</i> .
Gina	She talked about her decision to remove a student from campus due to behavioral issues. Influential factors included, among other things, <i>health and safety of the student, legal impacts, and timeline and logistics</i> .
Helen	She talked about her decision to sign a waiver to allow a student-athlete transferring out of her institution to be immediately eligible to compete at another institution. (Unless the original university signs off, a player who transfers is not immediately eligible to compete for their new institution.) Influential factors included, among other things, <i>NCAA rules, care for the student-athlete, and the right thing to do</i> .
Irv	He talked about his decision to not allow a student to do an on-campus color run as her Honors project. (A color run is typically a charity 5K race to which participants wear white and are doused with various colored powders by spectators and race workers along the course.) Influential factors included, among other things, <i>staffing support, parking issues, and time of year</i> .
Randall	He talked about the decision to codify/document student life and residence life conduct policies and procedures due to conflicts between the two departments over student discipline. Influential factors included, among other things, <i>retention, best practices, fairness and equity, and the right thing to do</i> .
Sharon	She talked about her decision to change the department's policy regarding the limit on the numbers of players from a team allowed to compete in post-season competitions. Influential factors included, among other things, <i>money, professionalism, and student-athlete feelings</i> .
Tara	She talked about her decision to not allow a specific student-athlete an exception to department study hall requirement for student-athletes struggling academically. Enforcement of the policy in this instance was problematic because the department had a history of not enforcing it consistently. Influential factors included, among other things, <i>policy, requirements, accountability, and the issue of being not being seen as a team player</i> .

After the funnel exercise, I moved on to questions about participants' more general decision-making processes, their definition of personal ethics, the role of ethics in their decision-making, etc. Then I shared two case studies. The first was about a student-athlete who, as a result of an in-game brawl, was arrested and then bailed out of jail by the college president (based on the incident described in Chapter 1). Participants were asked what they would have done in the president's shoes and why. Additional details about the case were shared, including the race of the individuals involved in the situation and the fact that bailing the athlete out was against NJCAA rules, and then more questions asked. Then a second case study was shared about Sam, a student and military veteran who was struggling academically, and the steps taken by a college advisor to help him (Rumann, 2009). Participants were again asked what they would have done and why. Again, additional details about the case were shared including how Frank, the advisor, knew that Sam was not getting the help he said he would get and the fact that other student-veterans from Sam's National Guard unit recently approached Frank to ask him to go to bat for them regarding their academic struggle. Then more questions were asked (see Appendix B for the text of the case studies). I concluded the interviews by asking if there were any influences so important that participants thought they should be added to the pre-printed options and if there was anything else about the topics of ethics and decision-making in higher education participants thought we should cover.

Of the eleven interviews, I transcribed nine. Two were transcribed by an online transcription service, and then I proof-read and extensively corrected those transcripts. The transcripts as well as the photos of the funnels were thematically coded as described in the next section. Due to the potentially sensitive nature of this line of inquiry, pseudonyms were used to protect the identities of the participants.

Data Analysis

When asked to describe a tough decision they had to make in their role as a higher education administrator and then write down all of the factors influencing that decision, participants collectively identified a total of nearly 100 factors. After participants were asked to consider the pre-printed factors, the number of influential factors increased. That number increased again after the discussions of their general decision-making and of the case studies. In all, participants identified approximately 150 factors that influenced their decision-making. There were conflicting factors, complementary factors, factors that overlapped, clear cut/easy to define factors, and complex, hard to explain factors. Despite all the messiness, similarities in participants' answers and the factors they identified as being influential to their decision-making became clearer through analysis of the data.

To make sense of all of the data, I used inductive analysis to code for major themes (Creswell, 2014). Although the analysis was informed by the literature review and the theoretical frameworks described in Chapter 2, I actually began the process with open coding in that I was open to anything I might find in the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). During the data collection and transcription phases, I began to identify reoccurring ideas and commonalities between the factors that influenced the administrators' decision-making. As I made notes about these ideas in the margins of the transcripts and on the photos of the *funnel decisions*, broad categories/ themes emerged. I then reviewed the interview transcripts and photos again, and coded specifically for these themes. Eventually relationships between certain themes became clear, and those themes were grouped together to form larger categories. At the same time, within some themes/ categories, distinct subcategories became clear and were also coded for. In the end, after careful analysis and reflection, several rounds of coding, and data reduction (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016),

I identified eight categories of factors that influenced the decision-making of the participants. The categories were: students, institution, people, process/regulations, money/other resources, professional identity, the situation, and the right thing to do/personal ethics (see Figure 1 and Table 3, respectively, for a depiction of these eight categories and more detail about this coding process). I also coded the transcripts for themes regarding the conflicts that arose between factors and how administrators handled those conflicts in order to help answer the research questions.

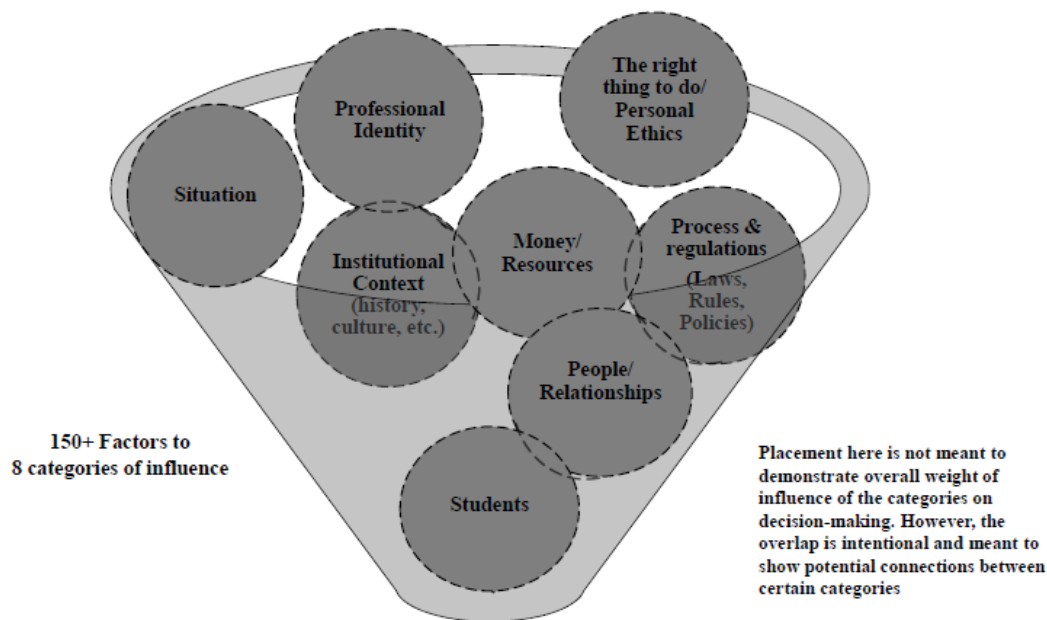


Figure 1. Eight categories of influence

To provide a clearer picture of how I got to the eight categories, I created a table showing some of the individual factors that make up the eight categories (see Table 3 below). Not every factor from the participants' funnels or transcripts is included in the chart. Some factors are excluded to protect anonymity; others are excluded because they are repetitive of another item. What is included should provide some insight into how the eight categories emerged. However, the reason individual items ended up in certain categories may not be clear from the phrase provided (often what a participant wrote on a circle). Thorough reading of the transcripts made

these connections clear to me. For example, Chad mentioned that *season ticket holders* and *boosters* influenced his *funnel decision*, but through my analysis, I determined he was not really talking about these groups in terms of people/relationships but rather in terms of the money they represented to the athletic department.

Although the eight categories of influential factors are somewhat distinct, they are not completely discreet. For example, students are people and more specifically they are people at the institution, so I could have put students in either of those two categories. However, given their significant and unique role in the world of education, students seemed to warrant their own category. Governments were mentioned in relationships, but also have significant ties to the laws/policies category. Furthermore, there is often a financial component to the relationship between institutions and governments. Even smaller factors sometimes related to more than one category. For example, Irv mentioned that *staffing support* was something he considered while making the decision to not allow an honors student to hold a color run as her honor project. When Irv discussed this influential factor, he talked about both maintaining a good relationship with the staff and also about spending more money to have more staff available to deal with the aftermath of the event (excessive clean-up around campus). Although not easily depicted in charts and diagrams, the messiness of the data and the overlap of some of the categories reflect the complex reality of administrative decision-making as described by the participants. According to Glesne (2016), no single perfect/right analysis of data exists; so while some factors potentially could have been coded/categorized differently, I believe the eight categories I am using are appropriate and helpful descriptions of the factors that influenced administrative decision-making in this study.

Students	campus safety; developmental issues; impact on student-athlete's future; relationship with student-athlete; student use; impact/ramifications; impact on other students; health and safety of the student; what's best for the student-athlete; student leadership experience; student-athletes' feelings; learning opportunity/teachable moment; responsibility; accountability, best interests of students
People/ relationships	relationship with coaches; coaching staff and their opinions; relationships; politics; state policy change; faculty/advisor push; outside vendor push, media/social media/public opinion; parent involvement; coach credibility
Process/ Regulations	process; categories of review; legal impacts; NCAA rules; laws; potential (legal) risks; current policy; NCAA and department requirements
Institution	practice (what's been done in the past); impact on retention; history; audit; other departments needs/wants; protection of program's best interests; competitive balance (of athletic program); enrollment pressures; advisor issues; communication difficulties; alignment of university values; structure; organization of departments; consistency; institutional/departmental contexts
Situation	extenuating circumstances; unique characteristics of situation; categories of review; status of student; timeline and logistics of process; miscellaneous; timing; parking for 4000 people; time of year (finals week); mess (of a color run)
Right thing to do	personal ethics; right thing to do; fairness and equity; professional codes of conduct
Money	boosters, season ticket holders, cost/savings; state \$ limit; money
Professional Identity	job preservation; reputation, credibility; how I do my job; impact on my job; if not me then who; pushing back on boss; task force to do; professionalism

Table 3. Getting from 150+ factors to 8 categories

Validity and Reliability

Several strategies to increase the validity of the results of this study were employed. Although the terms validity and reliability can be problematic in qualitative research, ideally the goal is to ensure that data are collected and analyzed in a thoughtful, rigorous, and thorough manner (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), and I believe I did that. First, the combination of the funnel activity, general questions, and the case studies was an intentional decision designed to capture a more thorough picture of administrative decision-making. While the funnel activity proved to be a helpful tool that aided participants in remembering details about their decision, human memory

can be flawed. Participants may not have remembered all of the things they took into consideration. Furthermore, there was a possibility that participants would hesitate to share certain details about past decisions if those details were too personal or too specific. Providing the case studies offered participants a less personal way to reflect on the factors that influence their decision-making processes and how they handle conflicts between those factors in relation to a present, hypothetical situation. While the funnel activity, general questions, and the case studies were all part of the same qualitative, semi-structured interview, each part was so markedly distinct from the other part that, in effect, they served as multiple sources of data. Influential factors emerged during all parts of the interview, and each part of the interview also revealed more about how participants manage conflicts between factors and engage their personal ethics during their decision-making. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), having multiple sources of data is one of four types of triangulation, a strategy designed to increase the internal validity or credibility of the study. Together the three parts of the interview provided a more detailed picture of administrative decision-making thus allowing for triangulation of the data and increasing the validity.

Additionally, I utilized peer debriefers to review and critique the study. A peer debriefer can enhance the accuracy of the study by reviewing information as well as encouraging the researcher to maintain a wider lens of interpretation (Creswell, 2014; Glesne, 2016), and that was certainly true in this study. I selected peer debriefers with less direct experience with intercollegiate athletics and student affairs who were able to ask good questions about the study and bring different insights to it. In particular, they reinforced the idea that there is overlap among some of the categories of influential factors. For example, relationships with co-workers are very connected to institutional context because those relationships take place within the

institution, and personal ethics might be connected to relationships and/or to professional identity depending on the person. My conversations with the peer debriefers about these connections between categories helped me clarify that the messiness of the categorization is not a flaw in the coding scheme, but rather a reflection of the complexity of administrative decision-making.

Another common strategy to increase the validity of a study is to utilize rich, thick description to ensure that the study is “more realistic and richer” (Creswell, 2014, p. 202). According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), rich, thick description “refers to a description of the setting and participants of the study, as well as a detailed description of the findings with adequate evidence presented in the form of quotes from participant interviews, field notes, and documents” (p. 257). Earlier in this chapter, I described both the settings and the participants, and throughout Chapters 4 and 5, I provide extensive quotes from the participants to support my findings. However, I do not combine detailed descriptions of the specific setting and the individual participant with their quotes as it could risk jeopardizing confidentiality which would be unacceptable. Therefore, to the extent possible without exposing the identity of the participants, I utilize rich, thick description to enhance the validity of my study.

I also utilized a process of bracketing in order to acknowledge and move beyond my own preconceptions and assumptions and enhance the validity of the study. I worked hard to limit the impact of my own past experiences and biases on this study. For example, despite being a former athletic director, I did not allow my expectations regarding knowledge of and adherence to NCAA and/or NJCAA rules to interfere with my goal of understanding the decision-making of my participants. According to Tufford and Newman (2012), bracketing, and the increased self-awareness it brings to the researcher, “has the potential to greatly enrich data collection, research findings, and interpretations” (p. 85).

Limitations

No study is without limitations; therefore, it is important to acknowledge the limitations present in this study. First, self-reflection can be challenging for participants. Haring-Hidore et al. (1990) indicated that their participants “had considerable difficulty in reflecting on their ways of knowing” and decision-making because these are complex processes that develop over time and may become second nature thus making them difficult to contemplate (p. 179). That could have also been the case for participants in this study. However, I believe the use of the funnel exercise during the interview helped participants recall their decision-making in a more detailed way than they might otherwise have done. Similarly, the use of the case studies may have also facilitated the reflection process. One other potential limitation relates to the thought that ethics can be a sensitive topic. After analyzing their results, Jordan et al. (2004) speculated that participants “may have given answers based on what they felt was socially acceptable versus how they actually felt” (p. 143). My hope is that the use of pseudonyms in my study allowed/encouraged participants to speak more openly and truthfully about the topic.

Another potential limitation stems from researcher bias. As someone who has participated in intercollegiate athletics on every level (athlete, coach, and administrator), my biases may have influenced the study in any number of ways including formulation of questions and/or interpretation of the results. However, every effort was made to minimize that bias through the use of bracketing, peer debriefers, and rich, thick description.

Summary

Guided by two theoretical frameworks and a constructivist viewpoint, I conducted a qualitative study in order to gain a better understanding of the decision-making of athletic administrators and student affairs administrators in higher education. One-on-one semi-

structured interviews were conducted at NCAA Division II universities in the same athletic conference within the same state. Athletic administrators and student affairs administrators were asked to describe and examine their own decision-making process. Data were collected and analyzed inductively through open coding. While eliminating limitations completely is never possible, every effort was made to minimize the impact of those limitations.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

After careful analysis and reflection, described in Chapter 3, I identified eight categories of factors that influenced the decision-making of participants in this study. The categories were: students, institution, people, process/regulations, money/other resources, professional identity, the situation, and the right thing to do/personal ethics. The influence on administrative decision-making of the factors in each of these categories is detailed in the first section of this chapter. Section two focuses on participants' emphasis of the complexity of their decision-making situations and how they handle conflicts between the many influential factors that push on their decisions. How administrators engage their ethics during decision-making, my third research question, is discussed both in section one of Chapter 4 and in Chapter 5.

Factors that Influence Decision-making

Students

Finding that administrators in student affairs and intercollegiate athletics think about students when making decisions is not surprising. After all, their jobs have more of a direct connection to students than jobs of many other administrators on campus. While students were not the only thing on participants' minds, student-related factors did account for approximately one quarter of the nearly 100 initial factors participants identified as influencing their decisions. Within those student-related factors, three sub-categories emerged: putting students first, student safety, and student development.

Students first. Several participants stressed that students are their first and main priority and doing what is best for them is what is important. For example, Diane, a student affairs administrator, explained her outlook by stating,

Philosophically I always want to work as often as I can with keeping the students at the center [of my decision-making]. And so, I'm gonna lead with that, and not want to have to move something else below students and the student experience [in my funnel] without some compelling need to do so.

Similarly, Randall, another student affairs administrator, indicated he “would have always had the student’s best interests at heart,” and Gina, also in student affairs, stated, “I know that I always try to do what’s right for students.” Later Gina went on to say “for the most part, I think that my priorities again are still the students. I mean I think that’s the most important thing.” Helen, an athletic administrator, saw “general care for the student-athlete being the core of everything we do; I think that’s part of my professional code.” She also stated “my job is to create the best student-athlete experience possible.” When asked if he had any personal code or rule of thumb or specific questions he asks himself when making decisions, Chad, another athletic administrator, said,

I would always ask myself “what’s the best for our student-athletes, the university?

What’s best for our young people that I’m responsible for?” So that could be our student-athletes, that could be our general student fans, but that would be what’s in the forefront.

Eileen, a student affairs administrator, expressed similar thoughts. She mentioned that her primary goal is to consider how decisions are going to “impact the students” and indicated that one of her “gut check” thoughts is “students first.” She added,

It seems like such a glib thing to say, but I really think that people forget about that. I mean, you can sit at an academic institution, and for days and weeks and months, some people never see a student. They don’t understand that that’s the reason why we’re here . . . And so, I check myself to say “how does this help students? How does this help other

people help students?” And if it isn’t doing that, then I have to think about whether or not that’s really a good decision.

Even when it was not the easy choice and even when the student was leaving their institution, several administrators in this study still prioritized the student in their decision-making. In talking about her *funnel decision* to allow a student-athlete who was transferring out of her institution to be immediately eligible to compete for his new institution, Helen said,

The student athlete was in a situation where someone was going to take a chance on him. Who am I to get in his way? . . . If he goes on to be successful because of this opportunity at this other school, then we are doing what's right by the student athlete . . . [W]e sit here as athletic administrators and talk about [what] we're doing, always [saying] student athletes are at the core of everything we do. But are they? And I think this is the perfect situation to look at. Do we really care about them to their core even if it doesn't include being here at [our institution]?

Other participants also had to deal with student departures. When speaking about the seriousness with which she takes the decision to remove a student from campus and the detailed review process she goes through, Anna said,

It is hard. That’s the difficult part because . . . the decision you make is then kind of closing the door for a student that may not have other options, and that’s a hard place to be because . . . our mission is to help students get educated with a college degree so in a sense I’m kind of doing it a different way. So you know we can still have conversations about other options that they have, but it’s not gonna be here.

Similarly, Gina said,

So where everyone else on campus is all worried about keeping students here, sometimes I know that sending them home is like the best thing for them. But [I'm] looking at how is this going to impact long term for a student.

Eileen seemed to sum up the sentiment of several participants when she said, "I want to help students but sometimes it means not helping them in the way that they think that they should be."

Safety. Beyond generally helping students and being concerned with what is best for them, administrators frequently voiced concerns for student safety. For example, Gina articulated that "the health and safety of the student is the number one concern." She went on to specify that it is crucial to "look at the bigger, broader community, and is it disruptive to other students, is there a safety risk to other students, that kind of thing, so we really had to take those kinds of things into consideration." Similarly, Helen indicated that "[t]he right thing to do in the core of it is to create a safe environment" for all students.

More specifically, when discussing her *funnel decision* to eliminate one night from an evening campus shuttle service that takes students back and forth between campus and the downtown area, Diane said she strongly considered the "impact on the student experience." She went on to say that she asked herself,

Without this shuttle, how will students who have been using the shuttle or students who would have used the shuttle on Thursday nights . . . how would that impact them? Would we see an increase in students choosing to drive their own vehicles while under the influence?

Although she did not use the word safety, Diane's concern for the safe return of students to campus was clear.

Some participants, like Diane and Gina, mentioned safety while discussing their *funnel decision*. Others mentioned it while reflecting on the basketball case study. For example, while Anna did not necessarily think it was “the institution’s obligation to bail that student out,” she immediately stated “we have to think about their safety.”

In total, nine of the eleven participants mentioned student and/or campus safety at some point in the interview. The desire to maintain that safety was apparent when they reflected on past decisions as well as when they considered the actions they might take in the situations described in the case studies. They even talked about prioritizing safety over other factors—an idea I return to in the section on handling conflicting factors.

Development. In addition to their concerns for student safety, participants also frequently indicated a desire to see students develop and have an opportunity to learn and grow. For example, Irv indicated that his paramount goal was “to help people be successful academically and complete their [degree].” He went on to say that he works to “help students grow in whatever value system they want to explore” and to help them “be independent thinkers and develop their own way of thinking.” Similarly, in describing her decision not to grant a student-athlete an exception to the required study hall hours, Tara talked about hoping the student “learned a lesson. Let’s not wait until the last minute. Let’s be absolutely positively proactive about scheduling, time management, and making sure that we have what we need, just in case an emergency does arise.”

One way participants felt they could help students develop was by holding them accountable for their actions and getting them to understand that actions have consequences. Diane asked, “how do we teach students where the lines are and then [teach them that if] you make an informed decision and you go over the line, you bear the consequences of that

[decision].” Similarly, when talking about what to do with a student who made a bad decision, Gina indicated she would say to the student,

I’m still gonna hold you accountable. Yep it sucks that this was an influence and this is your life and all these different things, that sucks, but I also still have to hold you accountable. Now can we do that in an educational way or is it something so severe that you need to leave campus?

When reflecting on one of the case studies presented during the interview, and trying to decide whether or not to bail the student out of jail, Randall indicated that the student might need to learn a lesson. He said, “Did you do something stupid? . . . You might need to sit in there for a minute. I’m serious. You might need to sit there [in jail]. Let him sit so he can figure out what he did.” Anna had a very similar response. She said, “I think part of being arrested is being able to sit and think about what you’re doing, some reflection in a very forced way.” The consensus seemed to be that holding students accountable in this way would aid in their development.

Overall, finding that students influence the decision-making of higher education administrators in student affairs and intercollegiate athletics is not particularly surprising. However, finding that administrators list students as the first and most influential factor that impacts their decision-making is worth noting as is finding that protecting the students’ safety and supporting their growth and development were significant considerations for the study participants. Doing what was best for students was not always easy for administrators in this study particularly if what the administrator felt was best was different from what the student wanted or from what others at the institution might have wanted. In fact, institutional factors were also a major influence on administrative decision-making and are discussed in the next subsection.

Institutional context

Along with students, institutional context was one of the most frequently mentioned influences on decision-making. In fact, every participant in the study mentioned a factor or factors that could be categorized as institutional context (and/or departmental context). Factors named by participants included: *history, structure, enrollment pressures, protection of program interests, long-term effect of decision on program, alignment of university values, organization, communication difficulties, and retention*. Although the specific phrases *institutional context* and *departmental context* were not used by participants until after I showed them the preprinted factors, such influences were apparent in many of the initial, influential factors they identified, and participants were able to see those connections for themselves. Several times after I laid out the preprinted options, participants picked up *institutional context* or *departmental context* and matched it onto one of their initial factors (like *history*) by saying something like: “I think *departmental context* is *history*” or “*institutional context*, I think that’s huge because we have a lot of history with” this particular program. Overall, I identified two sub-categories of factors related to *institutional context*: 1) history, culture, and past practices; and 2) interdepartmental differences.

History, culture, and past practices. History, culture, and past practices were very salient pieces of *institutional context*, and participants thoroughly described the influence of these factors. Numerous participants made comments like “I think about what’s been done in the past as far as the institution” (Chad), or “the history of friendship and the culture that I have in the department . . . that would be included for sure” (Beth), or “you gotta take a look at your culture, the people, everything here” (Sharon).

Other participants went into greater detail about how institutional history affected their decision-making. For example, Anna explained that,

right before I came here, we had a shooting at one of the off-campus apartments, and it wasn't one of our students, but our students were involved because of the type of event it was, and so now if there's a shooting or any kind of gun, it's a whole different piece because it's like oh my gosh it can happen here.

For Eileen, history was particularly influential to her *funnel decision*. In describing the impact of a recent funding cap the state government had placed on a program at her institution and then her decision-making in the wake of that cap, Eileen talked a lot about the university's history with the program. She stated,

Institutional context, I think that's huge because we have a lot of history with regard to the program. We have a tremendous amount of people involved in this, you know, academic and student services, the President is very interested in these . . . students, so you know in terms of breadth and then depth of the organization we've got a lot of people [involved]. . . We're a big player in [this program], and I think that that really makes this a big decision, a lot of stakes.

Similarly, in making decisions about what to do regarding their evening campus shuttle service, Diane found history to be especially relevant. She indicated that

history was something I considered . . . very early on. Where did this come from? Whose decision was it? I think it's important if those players are invested, are still here, you know, they should be included, if they want to be, in terms of decisions about its future, if that's possible, and so certainly that was a factor.

She also stated that history was important because she was new in her role and did not have all the facts. She went on to say that

there are myths about . . . how long it's been around, and if it's always looked the same, this and that, and the more I would dig in, the more I would learn, and so I had been given the impression that it was a program that we offered for 3, 4, 5 years. Found an article in our student newspaper . . . where it was celebrating its 15th year so I thought these are the kinds of things you need to know.

Being new to his position as well, Randall found that history and culture were important to consider. He said,

I challenged a system that has been in place for a long time. And . . . culture eats strategy every day for breakfast. I think that's the saying. Culture eats strategy for lunch, that's what it is. And I got that, but in my conversations with the team, to help sort of move this along, I had to help them understand sort of where I was coming from. I try not to just do edicts . . . I don't want to be the new guy saying "everything you're doing here is crappy." I don't want to do that, but. . . I also knew there were some folks who felt we need to make this change, so that was also helping address that sort of potential conflict. And so it was worth it. I wasn't losing any sleep that I was making people's lives miserable.

Being relatively new to a position and encountering a challenging history and culture was an experience shared by Tara as well. Describing her *funnel decision* to not allow a student-athlete an exception to a departmental policy, she said,

There is a policy in place. There has been a history and a culture, however, of no accountability, no enforcement and . . . so when I come in and enforce the policy, it's like

I'm changing everything when no, . . . basically I'm just enforcing the policy, so I think that's *institutional context*.

Interdepartmental differences. History was not the only piece of *institutional context* that influenced decision-making of participants. *Departmental contexts*, and specifically interdepartmental differences, were also influential. For example, at Eileen's institution different approaches to student services across campus made communicating with students regarding the state funding changes very challenging and led to a decision to skip over the advisors and communicate directly with students. She explained that her department is

a walk-in service area, and so people are used to coming here every year to make sure their monies are doing alright and what not. And our processes are the same regardless of whether you're in the college of business, whether you're in the college of education. But in the academic units it's very different. Each college has very different procedures in terms of how many times a year you're supposed to go to your advisor, what kind of holds are being placed on you, what kind of scheduling activity takes place, do they schedule with you, do you do it independently and then they check. So there's a whole variety of things that aren't really consistent, and that makes it very difficult for us to communicate to students because we don't really know what's happening on the ground, and so that particular factor prompted us to have to communicate directly with students, and some of the advisors felt like they should have been the ones to deliver this news.

She further explained,

Departmental context, I think that's very, very important because again you know financial aid folks are used to dealing with financial news all the time whereas advisors have been less close to that process, and I think this particular program uniquely ties

those things together such that everybody's gotta understand each other a little bit more than they used to. And I'm not sure that people have a sort of shared institutional context but are only looking at in it terms of "well advisors would do this because we want to tell people that they can take this course because their ultimate goal is for this degree" and financial aid people are saying "look I can't pay unless it's this, this, or this, and I gotta have a note from you in the degree audit to explain x, y, and z or else the auditors are gonna come down on me." And so I think that's very big.

Similarly Chad, an athletic administrator, also reflected on how differences between departments can influence decision-making. He stated,

I don't think academia or student affairs or anybody else would see the pressure to generate revenue, the pressure to generate excitement and fanfare. They wouldn't see that importance like we would, and so we definitely saw it different than other departments.

Randall also indicated that communication issues and inconsistencies between departments (both aspects of institutional context) influenced his decision-making. He explained that departments were clashing. There was no clear demarcation between when does the conduct person get involved in a res life situation and when does res life get involved in conduct. It's kind [of] just all blurred, and it needs to be clear.

Given that all the *funnel decisions* were work-related decisions, it is not surprising that the institutional context in which the decisions were made influenced the participants.

Specifically, participants identified history, culture, and past practices along with interdepartmental differences as factors that influenced their decisions. Some might argue that a person's boss and/or co-workers should be considered pieces of institutional context, as well.

However, these relationships and others were so salient to participants that they emerged as their own category of factors. The next subsections details the influence of those relationships.

People/relationships

At one point Helen said, “people matter to people,” and that sentiment was abundantly clear from the ways in which people and relationships influenced decision-making of the participants. From bosses and co-workers to community members, state governments, and even family members, people/relationships featured prominently in participants’ funnels and in their discussions. An additional, different type of relationship also played in—a broader, less specific relationship with the public. Public opinion/perception was a commonly cited influence, and it was often tied to media/social media. The following subsection details the influences these various people/relationships have on administrative decision-making.

Boss/co-workers. Participants indicated that professional relationships with their boss and/or their co-worker influenced their decision-making in a number of ways including their decision to take their job in the first place as well as in the freedom they felt making all of their work-related decisions. Additionally, several participants mentioned relationships with co-workers as influencing their *funnel decision* or other decisions they discussed. Those relationships with bosses and coworkers appeared to be influential in both supportive and challenging ways.

The relationship with their supervisor was quite influential for some participants. For example, Anna, a high-ranking student affairs administrator, shared that one of the reasons she took her job was because of the institution’s president. She explained,

I spent a lot of time with him in the process, and he even flew to where I lived and spent a better part of a day with me to talk about his expectations and what he did before I took

the job. So I felt very comfortable that I was gonna be in a place where I had a lot of autonomy, a lot of responsibility, but a lot of autonomy, but I also had somebody I could run things off of, and . . . I do not feel the need, or anybody pressuring me, to do things that I don't think are right. And in fact, I'm very much supported to push back. You know, the president will often say "push back on that decision if you don't think it's the right one."

Diane, another student affairs administrator, also talked about how the relationship with her boss and level of the autonomy within that relationship influence her decision-making. She stated,

It's interesting because I have a very kind, nice supervisor who provides, I would say, the appropriate amount of autonomy . . . She often will share her opinion, but in the same breath say "but do whatever you want." I find that to be positive and negative . . . It's very challenging when we're not on the same page, and now I'm [over] here, and I'm hearing you're [over] here, but "do whatever you want." As opposed to, how do we come to something that we can both live with or you're just gonna say it needs to be this way, you know? So it's good and bad. But I generally, more so than not, appreciate that she recognizes that I'm at a particular level . . . she always says "and you're smart," and that I can make good decisions, and ultimately even if she would have made a different decision, I think if there were ramifications for the direction I decided to go in differently than her own that she would be supportive. So yeah that's ultimately very helpful.

Tara, on the other hand, seemed to indicate that her boss did not afford her the same autonomy. She stated,

I am not the final decision-maker, the director of athletics is. So he is the administrative piece that would make the final decision, and I would make my recommendation to him, but he would be the final decision-maker as the head administrator of the department. She went on to voice her frustration saying, “I operate the area so this should be a decision that should come from me. So that’s a conflict I think.”

Relationships with supervisors were not the only work relationship to influence decision-making. For example, in addition to frustration with her boss, Tara referenced some tension with her co-workers (coaches) and the issue with getting them to accept some responsibility for their athletes’ situations. She indicated wanting to say to them,

As a coach you get reports in your box every week, so this student who you’re saying is very important to you to be at preseason, you know to tell her “get your stuff [together].”

So now coach, I’m gonna come back and put it on you.

Similarly Beth, another athletic administrator, indicated that tension in her relationship with the coaches in her department pressed on her decision-making. In describing her *funnel decision* and the factors that influenced her decision to report a rules violation to the NCAA, she stated,

I’m actually gonna start with *relationship with coaches*. So, two of the coaches that I told [about the ineligible player] are some of my really good friends. So they were the ones who I trusted to go to the head coach and let them know that [the student-athlete] couldn’t compete. So it was kind of thinking about how was that going to affect my friendship with them, and then the decision to self-report, they were very upset with me on [that], and so . . . that was a huge impact on obviously my friendship with them, but then the relationship moving forward with them understanding the importance of what I do and the importance of compliance. So that was a lot in one. So then the *long term*

effect with the team/coach relationship is that I needed them to understand that I was always going to . . . [be] compliance first. So no matter what, they couldn't put me in a situation as a friend to make me make a decision that wasn't right for my job . . . It was just a really hard decision to make because of the friendships and the relationships that I had.

Sometimes though, coworkers had a more positive influence on decision-making. For example, Sharon indicated that when making a decision she felt it was important to ask: "how can we help our coaches succeed and be successful? How can we help them win championships? How can we help them function?" She went on to say that

our job is to help the coaches do their job, and . . . what helps my decision-making in a positive manner is if I can help a coach in some way shape or form, whatever that is, whatever they ask for, I try to get it for them as soon as possible. So . . . helping them is enough for me.

Supportive or challenging, relationships with bosses and coworkers influenced the decision-making of participants. Some participants reflected on the amount of autonomy they were granted by their boss and how that influenced their decision-making. Conflicts with coworkers as well as a desire to support coworkers also both influenced decision-making. These internal relationships with bosses and coworkers were not the only relationships that influenced decision-making. Relationships with people and entities outside of their own institution were also identified by participants as influential factors.

Outside people and entities. Sometimes in higher education, students and administrators talk about being in a bubble, somewhat removed from the outside world. Participants in this study seemed to understand that that bubble is an illusion. They realized that

the university has connections with outside people and entities, and that in their role as administrators, considering those people and entities when making decisions is an important, significant thing to do. Additionally, those outside entities can make choices or changes or policies that force the hand of administrators and institutions and lead them into certain decision-making situations. Participants gave examples of both ways in which relationships with “others” influenced their decisions.

Perhaps the clearest example of an outside relationship influencing administrative decision-making came from Eileen. Her *funnel decision* involved the decision she had to make after the state government placed an annual cap on a financial aid program that her institution utilized extensively. She explained,

The precipitating factor in all of this and the . . . hard line in the sand was that the state presented a dollar limit, and there was no negotiation about that. It was just printed in one of the bills authorizing [the program] for that year.

The cap cut millions from the institution’s financial aid budget, and Eileen was left to figure out how to address that deficit.

Eileen was not the only participant to recognize the influence of the relationship between their institution and the state government on their own administrative decision-making. Randall also reflected on that influence. He talked about the fact that more and more often state appropriations are tied to “completion metrics” like time to degree, and he indicated that “that’s gonna have an impact on our decision making.”

On the flip side, Diane explained that her decisions (and those of her institution) have financial ramifications for outside people and entities. She stated,

We're very much integrated with this community, and the town here would look very different if we weren't here, and it's a wonderful thing. Because of that, the impact of our decisions on the community is part of our decision making here, and that hasn't been everywhere I've been. So you know, what's the business impact of this decision for [the external ride company we contract with] and for anyone else who may be employed by this contract? So thinking through that piece . . . because there's often ramifications there whereas there might not be other places.

She continued, "[r]elationships certainly could be impacted by decreasing the amount of business within this contract, the number of service days with students, those kind of things."

Broad relationships with the government or the community were not the only influential relationships that participants mentioned. They also indicated that family, their own or other people's can influence decision-making. For example, Beth mentioned her belief that

in any situation you're gonna refer back to how would it impact your family, . . . [like] that president had to make a decision that could have cost him his job, and that's gonna have a direct impact on his family.

For Sharon it was families of her student-athletes, specifically their parents that influenced her decision-making. She indicated that "explaining to a parent on the phone and having to deal with parents regarding their student-athlete's playing time, [and their] ability to travel is something that we really try to avoid at all costs."

Participants clearly indicated that relationships with people and entities outside of the institution influenced their decision-making. Specifically, state governments, local business, or even family members were all influential factors. However, not all outside relationship were as clearly defined.

Public opinion/perceptions, media/social media. A somewhat hazier, harder-to-define relationship that participants indicated influenced their decision-making had to do with public opinion/perception, which in today's world is often closely tied to media and social media. Sometimes public opinion was the precipitating influence on the decision that had to be made, and sometimes it was simply another factor influencing a decision. Although there were differing explanations for how public opinion/media/social media were influential, participants seemed to be agree that they were influential.

Two participants shared examples of how public opinions/perceptions about campus incidents, or even potential incidents, could serve as the catalyst for making a decision. Helen, an athletic administrator, indicated that public opinion

creates a perception that may or may not be real and we don't want that perception to build in a direction that is negative. . . You don't want to just foo-foo it and say "you know what, that's just tailgating." You know what I mean? Because it does affect every [thing]. Now you're starting to tarnish the reputation or image of the university and our athletic department [and] that affects a lot of people.

Similarly, Anna, a student affairs administrator, stated,

If there's a perception that somebody sexually assaulted somebody, it's very hard for me to say "well you just go about your business." You know we have to take a little break and figure out what's going on, and then go through all the process.

She went on to explain,

This media/social media/public opinion—that can have a crazy mess. As we say in the southeast, a hot mess. It can affect [decision-making] in ways because the perceptions

that aren't based on facts are in here all over the place, and they can totally skew how you're trying to manage all of this and deal with all of this.

For others, public opinion/social media had less impact on the decision itself and more on how to present and/or explain the decision. For example, Diane indicated that "when you think about decisions that are gonna impact students nowadays, of course this [public opinion/social media] is something to attend to. How are you gonna manage the message and involve students and communicate transparently once the decision is made?" Similarly, Sharon stated that "public opinion is certainly important when making decisions because you know those outcomes can be very publicly noted on social media websites so, for sure." When discussing her *funnel decision*, which involved cutting a night from their shuttle service, Diane indicated that because it was

a service for students, . . . it could be a very emotionally charged piece, if it was shared say in our student newspaper without all the context . . . so you know there's going to be a piece to manage there, and so thinking through the reach of this.

Irv made a more personal connection between the media and his decision-making stating that

most of the time I operate with [the idea that] I want to be comfortable with whatever decision I make if it ends up on the front page of the [local newspaper]. I'm not looking stupid, that I've made good decisions for a reason that there's some value.

Anna also mentioned the idea of seeing her decision in the paper, but had a slightly different take on it. She said,

I don't necessarily ask myself up front "would I want to see this decision in the paper or in social media" because you're gonna see it anyway. . . It's just a matter of what am I gonna do when the decision's there? And how will I defend it because often times you're

asked to defend things, but that's not part of the decision-making; it's just part of the reality of the world that we live in.

Public opinion/media/social media seemed particularly important in athletics. In discussing the basketball case study, both Helen and Sharon thought these factors would be relevant. Sharon indicated that "lots of that [outside attention] comes with the basketball situation, not a lot comes with the other situation." Similarly, Helen stated that "the court of public opinion" would weigh on the decision whether or not to bail out the player. Later, when asked if it would matter if the student in question was not an athlete, she stated that

it shouldn't, but it does. You know why? Because the way athletics and sports are within our society . . . We're a unique country. We're the only country in the world where sports have this much power and impact and money and influence and we can't change that. Right? We could, but it would take a long time. A different conversation. But that's the rules, whether they are formal rules or informal rules that we live by. It shouldn't, but it does . . . [a non-athlete] is not going to be on the front page of the newspaper . . . or on social media or on Twitter. Millions of people see and get to pass judgment [on athletes] and all that judgment has an impact on decision makers. It does. You know, it probably goes back to this media, social media, public opinion. It has a lot of influence on it. I don't know that it's the right thing or it should and it probably is what leads people down some different paths, but it's real, it's there, you can't change it. So that's reality.

The influence of public opinion was not just hypothetical. Beth shared that it played a role in her *funnel decision*. In deciding how to handle the rules violation, she indicated "public opinion was another big thing because he [the player she reported] was . . . a Division I transfer. He was a pretty good athlete. There was that public opinion as well. So that did play a small

factor.” Interestingly, she also indicated that social media was actually the precipitating factor to her finding out the violation in the first place. She stated that

media/social media/public opinion was a huge thing because it was how I found the violation. So that was obviously important because there was just pictures of practice, and normally I never would have found that out. I was just going through pictures of practice that day that our university photographer put on our website, and that’s how it happened.

Beth’s final comment on the topic offers good insight as to why public opinion might weigh a bit heavier on an athletic decision. “[A]thletics just has this extra level of visibility that people follow, . . .they’re not gonna know every member of the environmental club, but they’re gonna know the starting people on the basketball team.”

From general public opinion to specific relationships with outside people and entities and internal relationships with bosses and co-workers, relationships mattered to participants, and those relationships influenced decision-making in a variety of ways. For the most part, it seemed to be participants’ desire to maintain good relationships—between themselves and co-workers or between their department and the parents of student-athletes or between the university and the community—that was influencing their decisions. One of the outside relationships participants mentioned, the relationship between the institution and the government, is also connected to another category of influential factors—process/regulations. The next subsection details the influence of these factors.

Process/regulations (policies/laws/rules)

State and federal governments make policies and laws that impact higher education institutions. Every institution also has its own processes and policies. Additionally, there are

polices and even rules that are broader and/or come from a source external to the institution. For example, in athletics there are rules from outside organizations like the NCAA and the particular conference to which an institution belongs. Although laws could have been included in the relationship category and institutional policies could have been in the institutional context category, bringing these regulations together with outside rules seemed to make the most sense. Leaving the pieces in different categories could have been particularly confusing because participants themselves often blurred/blended these things together and seemed to hold an underlying presumption that institutional policies and processes are based on/tied to law or rules. The following subsection details the various ways participants explained the influence of process and regulations (polices, rules, and laws) on their decision-making.

While not everyone indicated that these factors influenced their decision-making, those who did often described them as high priority and very necessary factors. For example, Irv stated very simply, “I’m one to have support and make sure that we’re following whatever regulations or guidelines or policies [exist].” Similarly, Tara stated, “I always say—what does the policy dictate? Anytime a question is asked of me, I can always almost make a decision, almost immediately based on the policy.” Likewise, Anna indicated that

the biggest thing is, I think I have to start by looking at the process, like did we follow our process because . . . we’re supposed to be doing things, and if we didn’t, then all of this stuff doesn’t matter because it’s a matter of going back and saying, we didn’t do what we agreed to do. So that’s the one piece.

Similarly, Helen explained,

You know we needed to play out the process. I’m all about how you navigate the processes. You have to respect those processes and those systems. . . . Doesn’t mean you

have to like them . . . Let's figure out, again, how to navigate that process, but play by the rules. You have to play by other people's rules, and I think you have to consider that and respect that.

As with some other influences, these factors (process/policy/rules/law) occasionally served as the impetus for a certain decision-making situation as well as being a factor influencing the decision. In discussing her *funnel decision* Beth shared that “the NCAA rules are what started the whole thing . . . I mean there was a violation of that rule that caused the whole thing.” Later, when talking about her decision-making in general, she stated that

with compliance, and I know that I keep going back to that, with any of those decisions, I always have the NCAA rules in my head. So that’s something that I would always ask. Is this a violation or is it not a violation?

Similarly, for Eileen the change in state law is what forced her to have to make her *funnel decision*. Later when talking about other situations, she reflected on the influence that the institution’s admission policy and even federal laws like Title IX have on her decision-making. For her, regulations were particularly salient to her decision-making.

As mentioned above, some participants blurred the distinctions between institutional policy, outside rules, and even laws. For example when discussing the preprinted factors presented during the funnel exercise, Gina picked up one circle and said, “legal impacts. So are we following our process? Is our process good? Students are always going to say “I’m gonna to call my lawyer” you know that kind of thing.” Similarly, Chad blended institutional policy and law. He stated,

Policies, when conferring with our general counsel as to what our options were, there was really nothing. If somebody was to be belligerent in class and they were disrupting the

class, you can ask them to leave, but again in this situation when there's nobody being belligerent, they were just cheering for their team in the way they thought was the best, there's nothing you can do.

Helen's comments about trying to help a student-athlete also reflect this lack of distinction. She said,

I also explained to them here's the processes, here's what you need to know. Yes you may have been on Google. Yes you may have talked to a lawyer. But here's the reality of the situation. Lawyers don't always know the rules.

Similarly, Beth blurred the lines between rules and laws. She stated that "sometimes a student-athlete doesn't have a ride. They're from California, and they need a ride from the airport, and giving them a ride is actually illegal." (In fact, giving them a ride is not illegal, but rather against NCAA rules.)

Another finding on this topic relates to the idea that policies (and rules and laws) are not perfect. There can be problems with policies or rules. They may be unclear. For example, Anna recognized this issue when she explained that it is important to spend time

really helping students negotiate our environments because we set up a lot of policies and things that are hard if you're not internal. You know, students don't understand the structure of all the colleges and how some things [work] . . . they just know that they come in this door and they want to go out this door and all the organization in between makes no sense to them so we have to help them way-find along the way.

Additionally, policies may be in need of change. For example, Irv stated, "there are times where sometimes those policies may need to get reviewed or changed. So I don't look at those as forever or final." Sometimes there was a question as to whether following policy is helpful or

harmful. For example, Eileen said, “there’s a reason that policy exists . . . [it’s meant] to protect students versus just let them barrel through.” However, Gina indicated that, “sometimes there’s a rub between what’s good for students and what” the rules or laws say. She went on to explain,

I think of situations where I’ve called parents, and so . . . I need to kind of break FERPA here, but I’m worried about the health and safety of a student, and I think this justifies me calling mom and dad.

In actuality, FERPA allows “school officials to disclose, without consent, education records, or personally identifiable information from education records, to appropriate parties in connection with an emergency, if knowledge of that information is necessary to protect the health or safety of the student” (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). However, her point that there may be times when a law or rule conflicts with what the administrator thinks is best for a student is still valid. The question, then, of which is the priority—policy or people—was frequently reflected in the participants’ comments and is detailed in depth in the conflict section at the end of Chapter 4.

Regardless of the potential conflicts or possible imperfections of rules and laws, their influence on the decision-making of participants was obvious. Institutional policies and procedures, state and federal laws, and rules from outside governing bodies were all identified by participants as influential factors. Following these regulations seemed important to many of the participants; they seemed to see it as part of who they are and/or what they do. However, regulations were not the only things participants considered; other factors also weighed on their decision-making.

Money/other resources

According to the musical *Cabaret*, “money makes the world go round” (Ebb, 1966), and the world of higher education is no exception. While not every participant mentioned money as

an influence on their decisions, multiple administrators from both athletics and student affairs did. Also, money was one of the two most frequently mentioned factors when I asked what was missing from my preprinted circles; relationships was the other. For some participants money was inextricably tied into their job and their *funnel decision*. Others simply acknowledged that it was an influential factor. Either way, when it did play a role, it seemed to be a significant one.

For two athletic administrators, money was very important to both their individual *funnel decisions* as well as their general decision-making. Chad shared,

At the end of the day, my job is revenue generation, and the number one priority on my AD's list, my boss's list, is the bottom line. So we're gonna make decisions that are best for the bottom line. That's what his boss holds him accountable for, and that's what he holds me accountable for; so at the end of the day, that's how we make decisions.

This outlook was definitely reflected in the factors he put into his funnel. Although most of the factors were identified as groups of people, it quickly became clear that Chad was actually interested in the money those groups represented. For example, one of his circles was *season ticket holders*. When talking about them, he said,

Season ticket holders . . . that's our lifeblood as far as our donors, you know loyal fans, year after year. So I can't disappoint . . . I gotta be wary of their opinions because, ultimately, if I lose them then we're just not gonna make the revenue that we need to.

Money also played a crucial role in Sharon's *funnel decision*, a decision about whether to allow entire squads to travel to championships or to stick with lower numbers that the NCAA suggests and helps fund. She explained,

We currently don't have a regular source of funding for championship travel. We have some funds, but it's never enough, so we always spend more than what we have available

to us, and there's no guarantee from the University's general fund that they will cover that. So when it is not covered, we need to go into our reserves.

Money was the first factor she considered in the decision, and it was the most important, and it remained that way through our discussion of the decision and even after the introduction of the preprinted factors.

Athletic administrators were not the only ones concerned about and influenced by money. Student affairs administrators indicated it was an influential factor in their decision-making as well. For example, when she started her job, Diane had a lot of tasks handed to her, and she had to prioritize where to start. She indicated that the task (evaluate the shuttle program) that led to her *funnel decision* (eliminate a night of the shuttle service) was "higher" on her "list than others because it carries with it a significant price tag." She further explained that

as we project that the enrollment is going to continue to decline over the next 5 years, we need to pay extra attention to how we're managing our resources and the whole contract of \$13,700 [for the shuttle program] is a fairly significant chunk of our programming money, and not impacting a huge number of students, and so that was a big factor and certainly of interest to my department of student conduct. They have lots of creative ways in which they'd like to spend the money so . . . yeah, that was a big factor.

When I asked what other factors to include with my preprinted circles, she suggested money was one of the things I should include.

Diane was not the only student affairs administrator on her campus to be impacted by money. As established earlier, the *funnel decision* of her colleague, Eileen, was a direct result of a change to state law/policy that cut approximately \$2 million dollars from the institution's budget, leaving Eileen to decide what to do next. She also recognized the impact of money on

other decisions she has made as well. When asked about what other preprinted factors I should include, she said, “for me funding is a big thing because some things I want to do, and . . . I simply don’t have the dollars. Or those dollars are being ascribed to something else. And I think that’s also important.” When discussing the impact of being a Division II institution she said, “a lot of decisions we make here, I think, are because . . . we don’t have as many resources as big schools.”

Student affairs administrators at other institutions also discussed the impact of money/other resources on their decision-making. For example, Irv indicated that “some decisions may have financial concerns attached to them . . . Sometimes there's a cost to an event or a request, not just funding-wise, but just what are you committing resources for now and in the future.” Several factors he put into his funnel reflected this thought. For example, he talked about considering *staffing support* and *impact on the custodial staff* as he made the decision about whether or not to host an event on campus. Similarly, Helen mentioned considering the potential for “more overtime, more pay” for custodians who would be called upon to clean up after an event of which she was in charge. Like others, Gina also thought money should be included in the pre-printed factors. She stated,

I think money would be a good one . . . big picture, how we’re functioning, time and resources make a huge impact. There’s so much work we want to do with students, but oh my goodness we don’t have the people [or the money].

She also reflected on the impact money can have on the decision-making of others, adding,

I would think money’s gotta have a role here somewhere. I don’t want it to have a role, but I’m thinking that sometimes when people make unethical decisions sometimes it’s because of maybe a financial impact . . . I’m looking bigger, broader picture. Do we tear

down this building. . . do we move an office? . . . Like financially it makes more sense, but. . . how does it impact students? I think sometimes probably we make it on the financial [reason]. . . We're going to tear that building down, and that's where this office is, and now underrepresented students are now gonna have to walk across campus instead of this being convenient for them. Like that's an ethical question that has a financial impact, but it also has an impact on students, and so . . . I think I'm the person over here that's gonna make it on behalf of students, but I know that there's probably a lot of people that money talks . . . so that might be something that I haven't considered that I think some other type of ethical decisions might have a financial impact.

Overall, not every participant mentioned money/other resources as a factor in decision-making. However, several administrators in both student affairs and athletics felt money was a salient influence on their decision-making. Whether they were spending it, wishing they had more of it to spend, or trying to raise it, money was clearly something they considered when making decisions.

The situation

Based on the factors described above, there are certain big categories of influential factors likely to be present in a lot of decision-making situations in higher education, particularly those in student affairs and intercollegiate athletics. For example, there will likely be students; there will be an institutional context; there may be other relationships at stake; and there may be a policy, rule, or law involved. These consistencies might lead one to think there is an easy formula for administrative decision-making in higher education. However there is not, and Helen perfectly summed up why when she said, "[n]o two situations are ever the same. I think you always have to consider that." Throughout the interviews, participants repeatedly acknowledged

that they consider the unique aspects of each situation when making a decision. Some participants simply mentioned they consider the unique characteristics of a situation without getting specific about what those characteristics might be. Others got very specific when discussing their *funnel decision* and/or the case studies with regard to important, specific, situational factors that would influence their decision. Throughout these conversations a few categories of situational factors emerged as important: time/timing and the number of people involved. Despite acknowledging the influence of situational factors, concerns were expressed over the amount of influence those factors should have. No such concerns were expressed by participants about any of the other categories. This subsection details the various explanations of the influence of situational factors on decision-making as well as the concerns of some of the participants.

Vague vs. specific. During the discussion of their *funnel decisions*, two participants mentioned the influence of vague, unspecified situational factors. Anna, a student affairs administrator, was one of those participants. “[Y]ou just never know like what else might be out there. I’ll just put a miscellaneous category” she said. She mentioned that there are a “lot of pieces that interplay depending on what the situation is.” She further explained, “it really depends on the situation and what’s happening in the world and what’s happening on campus.” Helen, an athletic administrator, was another participant who acknowledged the influence of vague situational factors in her *funnel decision*. She listed a factor entitled *unique characteristics of the situation and the student-athlete*, indicating, “you gotta find out the unique characteristics, you know, the why. Why are we in this situation?”

Rather than vaguely mentioning situational factors, other participants identified factors that were very specific to the situation/decision being discussed. For example, when trying to

decide whether or not to allow a student to host a color run on campus as her honors project, Irv put *mess in housing, buildings, parking for 4,000 attendees, and interruption to campus* in his funnel as factors he considered. Had the student proposed a different honors project, those factors likely would not have entered into Irv's decision-making; they were specific to the situation. Chad, Eileen, and Tara also all got very specific with their funnel and talked about the influence of factors very unique to their particular situation/decision.

The *funnel decisions* were not the only things that prompted participants to discuss the influence of specific situational factors. Participants wanted to know a lot of specific details about the case studies, and indicated that those details would influence their decision. For Chad, an athletic administrator, both case studies brought up the influence of situational factors. When talking about the case study with the struggling student, he explained that if the student

didn't have anything going on with him, and if he didn't communicate any hardships then I would not go to bat for him. I think sometimes people just need to learn the hard way. If though, he was a student who had lost both his parents, and he was living off the government, check to check, and was homeless and was just going through a tough patch, then I'd go to bat for him. So it would have to depend on the situation and how I truly felt . . . if I truly thought that he had a chance or if he was just being lazy. If he was just being lazy, and choosing other priorities over his academics, then it's on him. I'm not gonna go to bat for him.

When trying to decide whether or not he would bail out the student-athlete in the first case study, Chad explained that

each situation, every kid is different. If this was a troubled kid who had caused problems in the past, who's a loose cannon . . . I wouldn't. If he was . . . hit first [and] was a good kid who was protecting himself, his teammates, or his coach, then I would bail him out.

Irv, a student affairs administrator, also indicated he would consider situational factors before deciding whether or not to bail the student-athlete out of jail. He said there were several things he would want to know including, "whether the student had anybody that he could reach to get bailed out to come back home." He continued,

Those brawl things can get ridiculous in a hurry. And, again, how far away is he? You know? Is it a student that's not a majority that's in a little town far away . . . I mean there's so many factors that could come into play here. You know, is it a kangaroo court? Is he going to have to spend a night in jail? Is he going to sit there and be harassed or assaulted or insulted or whatever? So all those factors . . . would come into play for me.

He also wanted to know, "what started the brawl and what was the tenor of the night, of the evening? Was it a longstanding rivalry? Is that a negative rivalry? What are the learning outcomes for that student?" Later he continued,

What's the discipline record of the student? Have they been involved in rough behavior or have they been warned? Have they had problems in other games? I mean there's so much . . . of that that goes [into it]. . . to me those are all the things that fill the database that I'm trying to make a decision on.

To further illuminate his point about the importance of situational factors, he added,

Let's say I've got a lacrosse player [who] got arrested for sexual assault. I'm not going anywhere to deal with him. This one because it was a big brawl kind of thing with all kinds of people involved, that's a little different to me than this one. I mean it's not a

shooting out in the parking lot. I mean if somebody pulled a gun out in the park, ok. You can just sit in jail; that's fine. But I can see how this one being related to the team and the experience is different than one of those other kinds of things where somebody made poor judgment. Maybe they're going on spring break and went to the bar and hit somebody. You know what I mean? Well that's life's lessons.

Whether they spoke generally about vague, situational factors or listed very specific situational factors in their funnel, it was clear that participants considered the unique aspects of the situation in their decision-making. Throughout the conversations it became clear that there were certain categories of situation-specific influential factors. The next subsections detail two such categories, time and number of people involved.

Time. One situational factor that appeared in multiple funnels, but played out in a unique, specific way in each situation was time or timing. For Irv, timing/time of year was an issue; the fact that the color run would take place during finals was problematic. Eileen listed *timing* as one of the influential factors in her *funnel decision* as well, but said it was the timing of applications of the students affected by the policy change that was the issue. She indicated that those students generally apply for University admission very late in the calendar making it difficult to know just how many students would be impacted by the decision and making communicating with those students very challenging. Very similarly, Gina put *timeline and logistics of process* into her funnel as one of her influential factors because at her institution certain disciplinary approaches have documented time restrictions; if someone is going to get a certain type of suspension, it must be executed within so many days. When reflecting on appropriate discipline options for a particular student, she had to consider if she had the time to execute various options depending on the situation.

Number of people. In response to the case studies and other questions during the interview, there was one other situational factor several participants mentioned that influenced their decisions—the number of people involved in the situation/affected by the decision. Helen, an athletic administrator, put it most succinctly when she said, “[t]he number of people it impacts comes [in] to it.” Anna said, “it depends on the numbers” and provided an example of what she meant. She stated,

If I have ten students telling me that something happened and they don’t feel safe, and one student saying it didn’t happen, it’s really hard to say I don’t believe either one of you, but what I have to do is say ok if I’ve got ten students who are afraid of this one. I’ve got to put this [*individual student’s developmental issues*] aside for a while, and we’re gonna support them [all], but we’re gonna do an immediate suspension or something like that, and then I’m gonna focus on making sure that everybody’s safe. And then what we’re gonna do is go through our process to make sure that this student really did something that shouldn’t allow them to be here, so it depends on the numbers.

Randall also considered the number of people involved and the unique characteristics of the situation. He hypothesized,

Let’s just say we have . . . ten students and nine of those students are heterosexual males and one is a gay male. We might have to make some changes for that one gay male student . . . [but] if it’s ten students and one likes one thing and the others don’t and it has nothing to do with any protected class, well you know sir I’m sorry. You might have to make the adjustment.

Randall was quick to clarify that he would be very careful not to “compromise any of this for the good of the group.” (“This” meant any of the factors in his funnel including *fairness and equity*, *personal ethics*, and *the right things to do*.)

Struggle. There is one more thing about the influence of situational factors on administrative decision-making worth highlighting. As illustrated throughout this subsection, administrators expressed their belief that unique characteristics of a situation should be considered during decision-making. Yet, certain administrators struggled with just how far that consideration should extend. Randall’s comment in the preceding paragraph hints toward his concerns about that. Additionally, while Gina put *status of the student (resident, international)* in her funnel, she was cautious about how much influence it should have on decision-making. She explained that

things come into play like with the status of the student. So does the student live on campus? If the student was on campus and we’re removing them, where are they going to go? And you know, it’s kind of not our problem, but you have to think about that. If it’s an international student, student conduct can have a really big [impact] on international students; if we were to suspend a student, and they get sent back to their country. We had a situation once with . . . I’m not going to be able to remember the country that the student was from . . . I’ll think of it at some point in time, but you know, he got sent back, and he was in a fear for his life kind of situation, so while we can’t let some of that influence our decisions, it’s a consideration.

Tara, an athletic administrator, was the most vocal in her opinion about how much influence situational factors should have on decision-making. She stated that, “sometimes decisions are

made based on too many situations and relationships. I think that decisions should be made on policy.” She continued,

I do think with every situation . . . [certain] factors do become more important. However, whenever making a decision, I always want to know what is the policy because that will help to bring you to the right conclusion . . . You know sometimes you do bring in empathy, and every situation is different. [However] I think there should be clear and concise decision-making criteria, and if not [a] policy book, [then] criteria when you have to make different kinds of decisions.

She further explained her issue with the influence of situational factors. She said,

It’s not fair because . . . [if] you meet a certain criteria, I will make a certain decision for you. Because you’re on the basketball team, and not our little swimming team, I will make an exception for you. Because you are a veteran, and I know you served this country, and a single mom that comes in, she didn’t, I will make a distinction for you [the veteran]. Or because you’re a single mom and you’re struggling, and then a person with a silver spoon in their mouth comes in, I’m gonna feel sorry for you so I’m gonna make a decision for you. No. We’re gonna make decisions based on the situation and the policy.

Despite her desire to focus on the policy, situational factors and the influence they can have were clear within some of her other comments. For example, she stated,

If a student comes in . . . [and] that young lady is on the women’s soccer team and if I grant her this [exception] and other women’s soccer players come in because they feel as if I granted her that, now I should grant it to them, nothing holds me to that. Nothing holds me to that because every individual has their own unique situation and so every decision that I make is based on their situation.

In the same breath though, she immediately added, “whatever that final policy dictates, whatever the final decision is, that’s what we’re gonna do.”

Part of what makes decision-making in higher education so challenging is that each situation is different. Participants repeatedly acknowledged that factors unique to each situation influenced their decision-making. In particular, timing and the number of people involved in the situation were important. However, participants also expressed a concern for how much influence situational factors should have. They seemed to be concerned that favoritism or personal preferences/biases might outweigh other factors if they allowed situational factors to influence their decision too much. None of the other categories of influential factors seemed to invoke the same concern. Participants spoke of other factors such as students, relationships, regulations, or professional identity without apprehension as to the amount of influence those factors might have on their decisions.

Professional identity

As described throughout this section, participants gave consideration to students and to relationships with other people during their decision-making. They also reflected on institutional context, financial realities, rules/laws, and unique situational factors. All of these external factors influenced their decision-making. However, there were also some more internal, more personal factors that influenced participant decision-making. In particular, a category of factors related to professional identity emerged as participants spoke about doing their job and maintaining their reputation/ professionalism.

Doing the job. All of the *funnel decisions* were work-related decisions, so participants were clearly doing their job, but for some participants this idea of doing the job played a bigger role. For example, when discussing her *funnel decision* to report an NCAA rules violation, Beth

shared that “*the impact on my job and the ability of how I do my job* were the first two things” she thought about. She then explained, “how I do my job was super important because I always want to be the best at everything that I do, so I knew what I had to do.” She later added, “I had to make the right decision . . . I also had to do what was right for me and my future career.”

Doing her job was also particularly important to Diane who said,

I was attentive to the fact that that was on my list of things to do . . . Day 1 I got this huge binder given to me by my boss, it was clear to me that she was ready for me to take this stuff on. So I paid attention to that . . .

She continued,

This was assigned work, so that’s also a consideration. There was a task force that came together and identified work that needed to be done, and so I think there’s a place for that in here too. You know, this was important to the task force and a group of people that someone take a look at this . . .

For Chad the idea of doing the job played into his funnel differently, but it was no less important to him. Not wanting to do something that others thought was part of his job was at the heart of Chad’s *funnel decision*. The first factor he considered while facing the situation was *disagreement or pushing back* to his boss. He explained,

The initial decision I had to make was “am I gonna push back to my boss who was new on the job, who didn’t hire me, and who I don’t know if I can push back to or not?” So that was a tough decision. Yeah that was a big one.

He seemed to be concerned that he might lose his job if his boss thought his behavior was inappropriate or unprofessional.

Reputation/credibility/professionalism. Other participants also worried about maintaining their professionalism as well as protecting their reputation and credibility. When reacting to the second case study and thinking about whether or not to go to bat a second time for a struggling student, Irv indicated he “would not go to bat . . . I'm not going to stick my reputation on” defending him. Similarly, Randall said that he

would also have a conversation with the student, and say, “look I put my neck . . . out for you . . . and because you're not holding your end of the bargain, I have credibility on this campus and I don't want to lose that credibility.”

Concerns about credibility and reputation were not just hypothetical. After deciding not to allow a student an exception to mandatory study hall requirements (her *funnel decision*), Tara worried what the decision might do to her reputation. She shared,

I hope it is not deemed that I am not a team player because I think this is the ultimate way to show you are a team player because I'm not gonna make a decision just based off of your need. I'm gonna make a decision for the total need for the total department.

Also connected to maintaining one's credibility and reputation was the idea of professionalism. When talking about maintaining professionalism while trying to navigate administrative hierarchy, Sharon indicated that

if you jump over too many layers to get an answer, and you haven't started at square one, you kind of undermined that person. . . and you know I think it's . . . a matter of professionalism and professional respect to work your way up the chain of command . . .

To Sharon, showing that respect was a way to maintain professionalism and reputation. She also saw it as a way to continue to be able to do her job effectively in the future since a person who feels undermined or disrespected “could make your life a little more difficult day to day.”

Together, maintaining professionalism, credibility, and reputation and the participants' desire to do their job, and do it well, form the category of professional identity. While not every participant mentioned factors in this category, those who did seemed to feel strongly about the influence of such factors on their decision-making. This category reflects some of the more internal, personal factors that participants felt influenced their decision-making. The next category, the right thing to do/personal ethics, is also an internal category.

The right thing to do/personal ethics

The final category of factors identified by participants is also a personal category. This category is the right thing to do/personal ethics. For some participants doing the right thing was simply a factor in their *funnel decision*. For others it was bigger than the funnel and seemed to be a broader influence, underlying all of their decision-making. Some participants also made strong connections between doing what was right and their past education and training. The next subsections detail the way the right thing to do/personal ethics influenced participants.

In the funnel. Only two people mentioned anything about doing the right thing in their funnel before my preprinted *personal ethics* circle was introduced. Helen, an athletic administrator, wrote *right thing to do* on one of her circles and placed it in her funnel from the very beginning. Although she did not have much to say about it when describing her initial factors, she did come back to it after looking at the preprinted options. She said, "I think my *personal ethics* is the *right thing to do*. I think [that] aligns with exactly doing that. I always try to ask myself what is, by itself, black and white, the right thing to do here." Randall, a student affairs administrator, actually placed two such factors in his funnel—*the right thing to do* and *fairness and equity*. He explained,

This is what I believe—you always have to do the right thing. And not because I say it’s the right thing . . . We have to do the right thing, and the right thing is parents, families, students need to know what we expect, and part of what we expect is outlined and codified in your student handbook.

After looking at the preprinted options, both Helen and Randall made additional connections between my wording and their own. Helen stated, “I think those three, *professional code of conduct, personal ethics, past education and training* are closely related to what I think is the final long term effect of the decisions on the student athlete.” Randall stated,

It goes to this—we have to *do the right thing*, we have to be *fair and equitable*, and I think for me that’s part of my . . . that’s kind of a code that I put on myself . . . my personal ethics and my professional code of conduct sort of blend together. I believe that . . . you always have to do the right thing and also you have to take yourself somewhat out of the process, I don’t know if that makes sense when you’re talking about your personal ethics, but what I mean by taking yourself out of it, there may be some things that I don’t necessarily agree with but I think it’s the right thing to do because it is the right thing to do. Because when we aren’t being fair, regardless of what I think of an individual or a group of people, I can’t let that influence [me] . . . I can pride myself on removing myself, . . . my personal opinion, sometimes from a situation. I think that’s a skill set that I have developed over the years.

Unlike Helen and Randall, Sharon did not mention doing the right thing or anything obviously similar in her funnel. However, upon seeing the preprinted options, she immediately pulled *personal ethics* into the funnel right next to *student-athlete’s feelings*. She said, “*personal*

ethics . . . I believe is related a little bit to the student-athlete feelings part.” When I asked how so, she explained,

I think, again, leaving somebody out is hurting somebody’s feelings, and I’m just not made up that way to want to be [like that]. . . you know I never liked cliques . . . that bothers me personally.

Likewise, although Beth did not initially have any obviously similar factors in her funnel, she also pulled in *personal ethics* when she saw the preprinted options. She said,

Personal ethics was huge. Because even though I had people telling me not to do it, I knew what I had to do and . . . I knew that I had to do the right thing. So as a compliance officer, you just have to have that personal ethics to know that no matter what, when it comes down to it, you’re gonna make the right decision. With NCAA rules, there’s a lot of gray area so you can live within the gray a lot, but when it comes down to it and you know when there’s a right and a wrong, you know when to act and when not to.

Bigger than the funnel. Some participants indicated that ethics played a bigger role in their decision-making than just being one more influential factor in the funnel. For example, Helen stated that “*personal ethics* are always going to be ever present.” Similarly, Anna shared that, for her, “ethics . . . would be pretty consistent because they’re gonna guide the rest of this.” By “this,” she meant all of the other factors and the overall decision-making process. She further explained that

personal ethics, and . . . the *professional code of ethics*, those all are how I do my work, but that’s based on . . . so NASPA has codes of ethics and so forth, and so . . . those are some of the things I go to when I think about how do I best manage these pieces.

Gina stated that *professional code of conduct* “is right down in here [underneath the funnel]. And *personal ethics*. I don’t think you can do this work without those two things being almost like core values in anything that you do, in any decision that you’re making.” Eileen described *personal ethics* and *professional code of conduct* (along with *departmental context* and *institutional context*) as her four most influential factors. She said,

I think those four are probably ones that, you know, if I think in general about what my day is, those are ones that [are] kind of top of mind. And I find myself sort of thinking of those things and sort of referring to them as I’m pulling out decisions.

Past education and training. Another factor participants associated with doing the right thing is *past education and training*. Although no one had this (or anything close to it) in their funnel before the preprinted options, nine of eleven put it in their funnel after the preprinted options were presented to them. At that point, they seemed to feel strongly that it did influence their decision-making. For example, Helen stated, “*past education and training*. I think you have to say that that’s always part of it. I think that all goes in there.” Diane provided a more specific example of that influence. She shared,

Past education and training, . . . I’ve been other places where our work around reducing risk as it pertains to students use of alcohol and other substances is much further along than here for whatever reason. And so . . . I bring that experience and that lens here.

Beth also pulled this factor into her funnel. She said,

Past education and training, I think I can include this one as well. Obviously my education is what helped me make the decision, and the training . . . so I think that this would play an important factor as well.

Gina associated the influence of *past education and training* with rules, indicating that it

plays a heavy role in some of these decisions. Just because you have to know the law, you have to know your policies, you have to know best practices, you have to know all of that stuff in order to kind of do some of this, so I think that that's [*past education and training*] there.

Initially I would not have thought to include *past education and training* in this particular category of *the right thing to do*. However, the participants themselves closely associated past education and training with personal ethics and professional code of conduct. For example, Diane stated,

Past education and training, personal ethics, professional code of conduct, not the words that I'd used, but I think, you know, in terms of my approach . . . I would say that fits in with how I do my job.

Similarly, Anna lumped them together when she said, "all of this personal training, *professional code of ethics*, the *personal ethics*, the *past education and training* that helps you to kind of ferret out what the facts are . . ." Talking about general decision-making as compared to her *funnel decision*, Eileen indicated that "it's definitely more sort of *past education and training* and professional conduct that would probably come in a little bit more."

Overall, although none of the participants used the phrase *personal ethics* until after they saw the preprinted circles, there is evidence that personal ethics influenced the decision-making of the participants. They may have called it *the right thing to do*, or something even less obvious, but it was there. For some it was in their funnel along with the other factors; for others it was outside their funnel as a broader, underlying influence. For several participants, their conceptions of *the right thing to do/personal ethics* may have been formed through *past education and training* as they were quick to associate those influences, along with *professional codes of*

conduct, as they talked about their decision-making. Together these factors formed this category of *the right thing to do/personal ethics*, one of the two more personal, internal categories of influences described by the participants.

Summary – Section 1

Overall participants shared a wide variety of factors that influenced their decision-making. After analysis, those factors were sorted into the eight categories described above. Participants' decisions are influenced by students, institutional context, people/relationships, process/regulations, money/other resources, situational factors, professional identity, and doing the right thing/personal ethics. Although there was some overlap and connection between the factors, these eight categories provide a helpful guide for understanding what influences the decision-making of higher education administrators in student affairs and intercollegiate athletics. It is important to remember that these factors do not influence decision-making in isolation. Numerous factors play into each single decision, and frequently factors compete/conflict. The next section examines the conflicts identified by participants and how they managed those conflicts.

Handling Conflicting Factors

As described in Section 1, many factors influence administrative decision-making. With so many factors (approximately 150), it is not hard to imagine potential conflicts between the factors, and really there is no need to imagine them. Participants revealed many conflicts between factors as they discussed their decision-making. Detailing the ways the various factors conflicted was not a challenge for participants; however, explaining how they handled those conflicts was a bit more challenging. When asked point blank how they did so, it was sometimes difficult for participants to explain how exactly they resolved conflict. However, through a

holistic analysis of participants' answers to various questions, their discussion of their *funnel decision*, and their responses to the case studies, certain aspects of managing conflicts between the factors became clearer. This section highlights a few categories of conflicts identified by participants and then examines the ways participants handled conflicts between factors. Before examining the conflicts, I first detail the participants' emphasis on the complexity of their decision-making.

Emphasizing the complexity of decision-making

Prior to the interviews I was aware that administrative decision-making was a complex process, and throughout the interviews, that complexity was one of the things participants emphasized as they discussed their *funnel decisions*, the case studies, and their general decision-making processes. According to Anna,

It is messy, and there are a lot of people who get in the way. Because it's hard, you know, I talked a lot about policy and you've got policy and context, but at the same time you still have people, and people are messy.

She went on to say "[n]othing's clear. If it was clear, it would be a lot easier. If this, then that." Beth said, "it's not easy. You would think that it is, but it really isn't." Similarly Diane asserted, "[t]he work we do is just not so simple that you could be given . . . a rubric." In discussing one specific decision, Irv stated, "there's a whole lot of gray in there, and the bottom line is now this is all a mess." The idea of things being gray rather than black and white came up frequently. In describing her actions in response to a tough situation, Eileen stated, "I'm doing what I'm supposed to do professionally, but that sort of gray area in the middle made it a little bit more challenging." Diane elaborated on the idea of dealing with the gray in even more detail. She said,

I am a rule follower. That's part of my personal ethics and just my personality. That's where I'm most comfortable. That being the case . . . I like to think I'm more gray than black and white; you know it's not always that simple. So this is kind of a silly example, but we break the law all the time speeding, and I can imagine a very easy situation where you know somebody is needing help, and so . . . breaking the law in terms of speeding seems like the right thing to do. And so personal health and safety [of the students] is something that . . . would be probably more likely to . . . override a rule or a law or be an exception to [that rule or law].

Other participants also shared the sentiment that even rules or laws, which outsiders might assume are black and white, are not always clear cut. For example, Beth stated that “[w]ith NCAA rules, there's a lot of gray area so you can live within the gray a lot.” When discussing the impact of laws and rules on his decision-making, Irv felt it was his job “to help interpret those [laws and rules] from just black and white because there's an awful lot of gray.”

Throughout the interviews participants emphasized the complexity of decisions they faced. Situations and even rules were not black and white; decisions fell into the gray areas, and they had to sort through a swirl of influential factors as they made these complex decisions. Contributing to this complexity was the frequency with which the influential factors came into conflict with each other. The next subsection details these conflicts.

Conflicting factors

Just as each decision-making situation can be unique, conflicts that arise between factors can also be unique, and detailing every conflict identified by participants would not be helpful. However, certain patterns/categories of conflict arose among participants, and examining some of those patterns is helpful in understanding how participants handle the conflicts. The conflicts

detailed in this section include instances of people versus policy, interdepartmental differences, money/resource limitations, and conflicts caused by social media.

People vs. policy. As indicated in Section 1, participants often seemed to hold an underlying assumption that policies, rules, and laws are inherently ethical and based on what is best for the student. When discussing conflicting factors, however, they often described conflicts between policy (or rules or laws) and the people affected by the policies. For example, as mentioned, Gina indicated that violating FERPA (a law intended to protect students' rights) might actually be what is best for students. Although the situation she described may not have actually been a violation of FERPA, her point was that when factors conflict she would always "err on the side of the student and the student's well-being." Similarly Randall stated that if there was a conflict between policy and people, "at the end of the day, [it's about] what is the best thing for the students and how can we get around that [rule or policy]." Beth, perhaps the most rule-conscious and by-the-book participant interviewed, provided the clearest example of when violating a rule was actually necessary to protect the well-being of students. When asked whether there were circumstances under which she would intentionally go against a rule of law if she felt ethically that was the right thing to do, Beth immediately said yes. She then shared,

We had two softball student-athletes who are ineligible, and there was a . . . spring break trip to Florida. So ahead of time one of the coaches said "hey is it possible for these girls to stay in our house?" And I said, "absolutely not, they're ineligible. We can't give them any sort of travel benefits." So she said "ok, they're gonna come to Florida by themselves and just be there. They're gonna be there to support the team." And I said "ok, but we can't give them any sort of benefits." So the first night in Florida, their flight landed. They [the two girls] went to the hotel that they thought they had a reservation at, and they

didn't have a reservation, and it was like 12:30 at night. So they called the coach, and the coach said "just come here, spend the night, we'll fix it in the morning." So that was a violation, but ethically that was the right thing to do. So I even said to them "I would have told you to do the same thing. I have to write it up, and I have to report it, but I would have had you do the same thing. I'm not gonna leave you stranded in Florida." So yes there are times where I know that I would violate a rule, but I would still do it because it's the right thing to do.

As follow-up, I asked "and why is it the right thing to do?" Her reply was, "because it was. I mean it put their safety in jeopardy. So I wanted to do something that made the student-athletes safe. Above all, the student-athletes safety, to me, should trump any rule."

Not every participant felt the same about breaking rules. Helen stated, "I would never go against the rule of law even if I thought it was the right thing to do because, again, I may not agree with them, but they're there for a reason." In the same breath though, she quickly added,

It doesn't mean . . . [that] I'm gonna stop there. I'm going to find a way to yes. That's my goal in everything. That's why I think I was always good at compliance. Let's find a way to yes. Let's find a way, not around the rules, but how do you navigate the rules to get to the yes, to get to the end result that you need. It might take longer, might take a different route, but if you're really committed to it because you believe it's the right thing to do, let's figure out how to get there.

While Helen only hinted at the conflict between the regulations guiding the decision and the people involved in and affected by the decision, other participants who were also unwilling to violate rules or laws discussed the conflict more specifically. For example, Anna stated,

If you think of the travel ban, my professional ethics and personal ethics and training and education may differ greatly from our laws. So there would be some significant conflict. But I can't break the law. So even though I may be really in turmoil about the fact that this isn't the right thing to do, I can't do it differently. So the conversations we had with our students here were "we can't break the law, but we're going to support you in every way we can to do your education." And so helping them understand . . . "we're gonna do what we need to do, but we're gonna fight appropriately in the right ways. We're gonna do all the things that we do to make sure that you're able to get your education or finish your education at least." So there are times when there's conflict.

Eileen reflected on a similar conflict when talking about her role as a Title IX mandatory reporter, saying,

I struggle on a personal ethics side with having to tell somebody, if they're disclosing something painful that happened to them on an assault piece or something else, I struggle with the fact that as an institutional agent I'm obligated to report that . . . it's that balance of my institutional responsibility [to uphold the law] versus being a human being, and at that point just because of the structure and just because, you know, I would lose my job and then be unable to be in a situation to help more people, that I have to put the kibosh to [violating] that [law], . . . [but] it makes me very uncomfortable.

Not everyone who saw the conflict between people and policies was frustrated with the policies. For Tara, it was people's disregard for policy that caused the conflict. When she talked about having to step in, as a new employee, and enforce a policy that had not been enforced, she said that for too long

people have utilized relationships and counted on “oh well this is how I want to do it this semester, is it ok?” And you say to that coach “yeah you’re ok coach,” and another coach comes and they make another request, so now you got things being done ten different ways, and then when I come in, I don’t know about the ten different one-on-one situations that you all discussed, and now it’s different from the policy.

For a policy-minded administrator like Tara, this conflict was a definite source of frustration.

Clearly, Tara was not the only participant to highlight this conflict between people and policies. Some participants expressed frustration about the potential negative effects a policy might have on people; others voiced irritation with people who ignore policy. Which factor, people or policy, was perceived as the “problem” seemed to depend on the individual participants’ priorities. Either way, the conflict between people and policy was one of the most frequently mentioned by participants. It was not, however, the only conflict they described.

Interdepartmental conflicts. Another category of conflict identified by participants involved conflicts between departments. Different priorities, different operational techniques, and different communication styles between departments lead to conflict for some participants, and those conflicts complicated their decision-making. Conflicts and complications were not unique to just one institution. In fact, participants at each institution revealed ways in which interdepartmental conflicts factored into their decision-making.

For Gina, *other departments needs/wants* was one of the factors she put into her *funnel decision*, and as soon as she started explaining the way this factor played into her decision-making, she brought up conflict. She explained that with

other departments needs/wants, there’s often a conflict, maybe in a situation like this, where people from other departments are like “we want this student gone, get rid of

them,” that kind of thing, where we know we need to provide due process . . . they’re still entitled to due process, and so whether we want them to live in our residence hall or not, we have to let this play out. So sometimes there’s people on campus, besides students, that don’t like us, or like me.

Eileen also put factors into her funnel that reflected interdepartmental conflicts, and she explained that dealing with the bigger issues that led to her *funnel decision* “definitely revealed some things about our culture that are not particularly helpful.” She talked about conflicts that arose due to the ways different departments communicated with students. She then explained that most institutions that I’ve been at have been very siloed in terms of academic versus student services, and I think this is a prime example of people just not understanding each other . . . It’s just kind of getting to that point where we can get past the we/they, and we’re very we/they here.

Sharon, an athletic administrator, also discussed how interdepartmental conflicts impacted her decision-making. She explained,

We have competing interests at the university with regards to a couple departments. One is the conference center, and one is the athletic department. The conference center is charged . . . with making money for the University. So this last weekend we had a high school state competition and it occupied our entire arena and our fieldhouse, and as a result displaced quite a few of our athletic teams from their regular practice facilities. And that happens with some regularity as they have grown and brought in other events. Again, we get displaced and so we need to be mindful of how [the conference center is] viewed favorably by our vice president because of the money that they bring in for the general fund. And the conversations related to those things are dicey.

As she continued, she further illuminated ways in which differing goals and understandings between departments can lead to conflicts and complicate decision-making. She shared that one of the members of our department used to work for the conference center and still hasn't quite come full circle and gotten the athletics mindset. He put together a bid for the NCAA indoor national championship track and field meet for our fieldhouse, and in doing so put the budget together. I didn't review it before it went to the NCAA and nor did our AD, but in that budget he included rent charges to the NCAA. You don't charge the NCAA rent. You just don't. And you know, I've served on national committees before making decisions on where we're gonna have the national championship, and I would never have allowed that to go forward. We would have had a conversation about that. So the prospect of us hosting and putting in to host conference and national championships and the decision-making process now is a little different. We have to think about it because of the university's policy. They're treating it like a sponsored external event. Are we gonna put in to host this, and are we going to be responsible for paying for it, paying for the rent? That has been something that has been difficult and part of our decision-making process. When our coaches run fundraising events using our facilities, their facilities, university facilities, we have to rent the facility. So we rent by the hour, and so that is a decision we all have to make. Now granted they run some great fundraisers, but there's also the risk that you'll lose money, and there's also this ridiculous cancellation policy. So those are some of the challenges that we have that make decision-making difficult.

The institutions represented by the participants in this study were comprehensive universities with dozens and dozens of departments and programs. It is perhaps not surprising

that interdepartmental conflicts arose. At the heart of these conflicts were things like differing communication styles and/or different departmental goals or priorities that complicated administrative decision-making. Other conflicts, including money/resource limitations, also complicated the decision-making process.

Money/resource limitations. In the example Sharon shared about the conflict between the conference center and the athletic department, the interdepartmental conflict arose because of differing goals and understandings. Specifically, the goal of the conference center was to raise money for the institution, and that goal conflicted with those of the athletic department. That was not the only time money was a source of conflict for participants. It came up at an additional point in the conversation with Sharon, and other administrators also detailed ways money conflicted with other factors influencing their decisions.

In addition to being a component in her interdepartmental conflict, money was at the heart of Sharon's *funnel decision*. She identified money as the most important factor in the funnel, describing how it conflicted with every other factor in the funnel. It was lack of funds that conflicted with the *professionalism of the department*, the *credibility of the coaches*, and the *consistency* in the actions and messages of the department.

Similarly, in her *funnel decision*, Diane identified a conflict between *cost/savings* and other factors such as *student use*, *impact/ramifications*, *politics*, and *relationships*. Tellingly, Diane said “really if we had all the money in the world, we wouldn’t even be looking at” changing the ride share program. Since resources were limited and money needed to be saved, Diane decided to cut a night from the ride share schedule. That cut had the potential to negatively impact students as well as relationships with groups outside the university, and she acknowledged struggling with that when she said “[r]elationships certainly could be impacted by

decreasing the amount of business within this contract, the number of service days with students, those kind of things.” When asked what won out, which factor was the most important, she acknowledged that it was “saving the money.”

For Chad, money, or more specifically revenue generation, was at the heart of his job description as well as at the heart of conflicts experienced while trying to make his *funnel decision*. Specifically, Chad was asked by his boss to deal with issues of inappropriate behaviors by students at hockey games, and he immediately felt conflicted. He felt he was

in a tough spot because . . . as the associate athletic director my job is generate revenue as well as the game management. Those are sort of my two main responsibilities. So we increase revenue through corporate sales and ticket sales really. So . . . you gotta increase ticket sales, but yet at the same time you have to tell the [students] what they’re doing is wrong. So those don’t go hand in hand because the [student section] at that point was growing, and . . . I saw a conflict of interest for me serving in both roles . . . So I went back . . . and I said I understand we have to clean it up. You’ve been given the edict from the vice president to do so. I don’t disagree. However, I don’t think it should be me because I gotta sell tickets.

Like most institutions in the world, colleges and universities have to manage their resources, and limitations in the availability of those resources can cause conflicts within administrative decision-making. For participants in this study, a lack of money caused interdepartmental conflicts; it conflicted with the desire to keep students safe and with one participant’s professional identity. In reviewing the history of higher education, it is easy to see that money has long influenced administrative decision-making, so conflicts about money are not

new. Social media, on the other hand, is a much more recent influence on administrative decision-making, and the conflicts it creates are detailed in the next subsection.

Social media conflicts. As indicated in Section 1, numerous participants identified public perception/media/social media as a factor that influenced their decision-making. Like other factors, it caused conflict during decision-making. However, the conflicts involving social media related not as much to the other factors or even to what the final decision was, but rather how the decision was managed/enacted/communicated.

Specifically, social media conflicted with (or potentially conflicted with) the timeframe in which participants wanted to handle a decision, the way they wanted to handle a decision (publically or privately), and the approach they wanted to take with the students involved. For example, Gina discussed the way social media impacts the timeline of a decision, explaining that “the minute somebody posts that picture on social media, they’re gonna want to know what our response is. So this [*social media*] might become more important.” Later she added,

I’m not gonna make a decision differently, I don’t think, because of this [*social media*], I’m still gonna do what’s right. But who else needs to know, how are we responding, that kind of thing, the timeline of everything might change based on some of that. But I don’t think my decisions would change.

Gina also reflected on the way social media impacts the public versus private nature of a decision, stating,

It’s hard because a lot of the stuff I do is private. So I’m not going to tell you the outcome of a student conduct case, but that’s hard because somebody else might. So if there’s a victim in all of this, they might be out to the media saying “the school’s doing nothing” that kind of thing, but I can’t necessarily speak on the specifics.

Similarly, Irv indicated that his *funnel decision* “was pretty much all behind closed doors so it really wasn't a public thing.” He then acknowledged that “it could have been [different] if the students had chosen to rattle their sabers on social media.” Anna also addressed the public/private issue in her comments, saying that

public opinion, social media, in general, those are in [my funnel], but they don't necessarily influence this [decision] . . . It's a distraction almost because . . . this is all internal focused, and if this becomes external focused and I have to spend my time managing this that takes away from helping these two, the individual student and the campus. . . . So it's in there, but it's almost distracting to this.

She went on to elaborate on an incident at one of her previous institutions. Anne explained that a student posted something online on a blog, and it was awful, and unfortunately the student left their signature on the posting, so then people knew who they were, where they lived, and so even though we were dealing with all this . . . there kind of became another layer of how do we protect that student because even though they were going through the process of making a decision from conduct, now we had people who were not part of our community who were threatening this person, and so how do we go back and help that individual take care of themselves, . . . and so this [*media/social media*] is very distracting. Because the educational moment was gone. At that point in time it was like, “I think the best thing for you to do is go home. You know you need to go and be with family and be supported” and . . . that's a very different conversation than “help me understand why you did that.” And so . . . we couldn't get to that conversation because of all the social media pieces and public opinion and all of that.

Overall, while participants were hesitant to say media/social media influenced what they decided in given situations, they stressed that it did influence the ways the decision played out. Specifically, they acknowledged that it conflicted with their desire to keep certain decisions private and that it altered the timeline of some decisions and/or the sharing of decisions with the public. As the presence and impact of social media grows, it will be interesting to see what other conflicts it generates within administrative decision-making in higher education.

Handling the conflicts

Clearly there were conflicts between factors that influence administrative decision-making. Not surprisingly, no single, simple strategy for resolving the conflicts between the factors emerged from the data. No one said “I do x, y, and z each time I face conflicting factors while making a decision.” That said, participants did indicate that they gravitated toward a particular factor or factors. In other words, they would handle the conflict by prioritizing one influence over others. Regulations and money were sometimes prioritized depending on the type of decisions. Most frequently though, students, specifically student safety, superseded regulations, money, and everything else.

Student safety as the go-to, priority factor was an idea that came up repeatedly in the interviews. For example, as she finished telling the story of violating NCAA rules to protect the safety of softball players on a trip, Beth stated, “above all the student-athletes safety, to me, should trump any rule.” Similarly, Gina, Diane, Chad, and Anna all shared very comparable statements about student safety being the most important factor and taking precedent over other factors influencing the decision. Anna then moved beyond just a simple statement and talked through her analysis and prioritization of factors. She stated,

It's a really simplistic view of this but all of these things kind of bounce around each other in that funnel and then you know in the end, it's gonna be about the individual. You know, I guess if I had to pull out the three [most important] pieces, it would be about the individual student, about campus safety, and then about our process, and those things you hope are kind of connected in a way that you're making the decision that's gonna weigh them all equally. You know, but in the end . . . the safety is the most important piece.

Gina seemingly summarized the feelings of many of the participants when she said,

I don't think these two [*health and safety of student* and *impact on other students*] ever move. These are the core. I just don't know how they can move. I can't take, I can't put them up here [at the top of the funnel]. It's too important.

Student safety may not be a factor in every decision a higher education administrator makes.

However, when it was a factor, it was often participants' most important concern. Figure 2 provides a visual depiction of this prioritization.

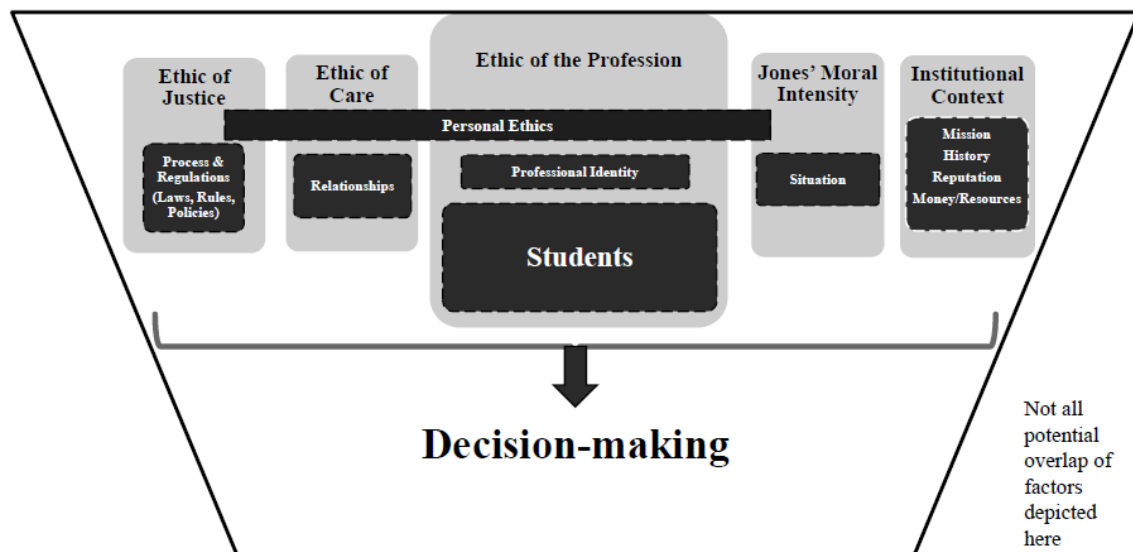


Figure 2. Example 1 of handling conflict by prioritizing a certain factor

Other participants talked about different factors aside from student safety being the most important things to them. For example, Chad talked about the important of money in his decision-making. Figure 3 provides a visual depiction of this prioritization. Although the factor that was prioritized was inconsistent between participants, prioritizing one influential factor over others seemed to be a consistent way that participants handled conflicts between the numerous factors influencing their decision-making.

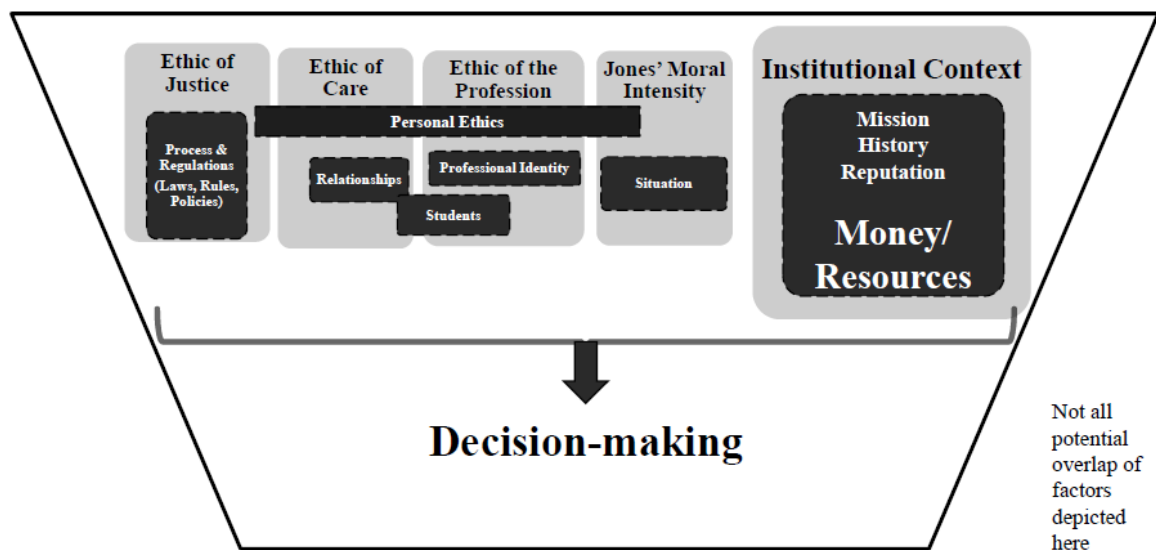


Figure 3. Example 2 of handling conflict by prioritizing a certain factor

Summary – Section 2

Handling myriad factors that influence administrative decision-making in higher education is not an easy task, and participants repeatedly stressed this complexity throughout the interview process. Part of what makes it so complex is the conflicts that arise between the influential factors. Four categories of conflicts seemed to be the most salient for my participants: people versus policy, interdepartmental differences, money/resource limitations, and conflicts caused by social media. While no single, simple answer for how to handle these conflicts presented itself, participants often spoke of prioritizing one particular category of factors over

others when conflicts arose. Specifically, student safety was frequently referenced as being more important than any other potential influence on decision-making, and remembering/reiterating that seemed to help participants handle conflicts between the factors weighing on their decision-making.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

My conversations with higher education administrators revealed numerous factors that influenced their decision-making. As I looked for commonalities and themes, I coded the factors into the eight categories described in Chapter 4. Those categories were students, institutional context, people/relationships, process/regulations, money/other resources, the situation, professional identity, and the right thing to do/personal ethics. After additional reflection, the connections between those categories and the two theoretical frameworks guiding this study became clear. Specifically, looking at the findings in light of the four ethics (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2000) and Jones' (1991) moral intensity revealed that in addition to the explicit influence of ethics on decision-making, described in Chapter 4, participants also engaged their ethics in more subtle, and perhaps less conscious, ways. I begin Chapter 5 by connecting my results to these frameworks. Later in the chapter, I turn to implications for theory and practice as well as avenues for future research.

Connections to the Four Ethics

The first of the theoretical frameworks guiding this research was the idea of the four ethics—ethic of justice, ethic of critique, ethic of care, and ethic of the profession (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2000). Although none of the participants said anything like “I utilize the ethic of justice to make my decisions” or “I operate from the ethic of the profession and make my decisions that way,” many of the factors they identified as influential to their decision-making were related to the four ethics. Specifically, within their comments were strong echoes of the ethic of justice and ethic of the profession. Fainter echoes of the ethic of care were also present. Consistent with other studies on ethics in education (Catacutan & de Guzman, 2015; Dempster & Berry, 2003), the ethic of critique was almost none existent.

Ethic of justice

As described in Chapter 4, many participants were deeply concerned about following regulations (policies, rules, and laws) and those items significantly influenced their decision-making. In and of itself, this concern and the influence of these factors reflect an ethic of justice approach to decision-making. After all, the deontological frameworks within the ethic of justice suggest that “leaders have a duty, obligation, and responsibility to adhere to the rules governing their profession” (Wood & Hilton, 2012, p. 200). This sense of obligation was clear in participants’ comments. For example, Beth’s definition of an ethical decision versus an unethical one was one of many comments that reflected this sense of obligation. She stated, “an ethical decision would be one that, you know, I wouldn’t break a law . . . [and] that I was following the rules to the best of my ability.”

Along with discussing the influence of laws and rules on their decision-making, participants made other comments that connected to some of the most foundational ideas within the ethic of justice (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011; Wood & Hilton, 2012). For example, Randall stated, “I’m gonna pay attention to what the laws are. I have a personal ethic that I try to stay true to in my decision-making and which comes to fairness and equity.” Similarly, when asked about her rule of thumb for decision-making, Anna indicated she would ask herself the following questions about the decision- “is it fair? Is it just?” When asked to define personal ethics, she continued,

I guess that’s the best way to say it is, it’s about making sure that I’m treating everybody fairly, that I’m using the same rules, I’m not making a decision differently because I know someone or I like someone . . . so I have the same rubric, in a sense, that I’m processing this piece with. It’s about being fair and just . . .

The ideas of fairness and justice were at the heart of philosopher and ethic of justice proponent John Rawls' approach to ethics and decision-making (Rawls, 1971).

Rawls is not the only philosopher whose views are encompassed within the ethic of justice. The idea of utilitarianism, as championed by John Stuart Mill, also falls under this ethic. Utilitarians believe that ethical decisions are those that result in the most good for the most people (Johnson, 2009; Malloy & Zakus, 1995; Mill & Sher, 2001; Oliver & Hioco, 2012; Robbins & Trabichet, 2009). It seems that at least one participant, Eileen, subscribed to such beliefs. When asked to define an ethical decision versus an unethical one, she said, "an ethical decision is one that I know that I've done the best that I can under those circumstances for the largest amount of people . . ."

While factors related to the ethic of justice were clearly important to participants, there were some inconsistencies in their focus on rules and laws that need to be mentioned. First many participants expressed a desire to follow the rules (or laws) and make decisions based on those standards, and I expected that administrators would have an understanding of the laws and rules they are supposed to follow. However, when discussing the case study about the student-athlete going to jail, most of the administrators (even those in athletics) were unaware that it is against NCAA rules, which govern their institution's intercollegiate athletics, for college personnel to bail a student-athlete out of jail for any reason. Of course, this rule is just one of the many NCAA rules for college athletics. In fact, the Division II NCAA rule book for 2016–2017 was a very dense 391 pages, and it is understandable that not every administrator knows every rule. However, how can an administrator claim to make decisions based on the rules if they do not actually know the rules? Similarly, while I understand Gina's point about potential conflicts between regulations and what is best for the people those regulations affect, the fact that she

thought she would be violating FERPA by disclosing student information to parents during an emergency reflects a lack of understanding of the details of the law. Is it that rules and laws are too copious? Too complex? The fact that even administrators who want to abide rules and laws may not be doing so due to a lack of knowledge raises a red flag about the preparation/professional development of higher education administrators.

Another discrepancy in the idea of relying on rules and laws for decision-making revealed itself as I reviewed Diane's *funnel decision*—the decision to cut a night from the college's evening shuttle service from campus to the city's downtown area and back. Although she mentioned wondering if eliminating the shuttle service might result in students driving back to campus on their own possibly intoxicated, she did not discuss any legal considerations related to the ride program and the students. I wondered if there was any worry that eliminating any of the shuttle services might somehow result in the college being held responsible for the illegal drinking and driving. I also wondered if students who got on and off the shuttle were carded or if the school presumed that they would be carded at the downtown establishments and then not served if under 21. Although I cannot assume that Diane did not consider these issues, she did not put the law in her funnel nor did she mention these ideas during our conversations.

Despite these few inconsistencies, the administrators in this study expressed strong concern for rules and laws and the ideas of fairness and justice, all of which can be connected to the ethic of justice. They demonstrated in a variety of ways how those factors and this ethic influence their decision-making, and finding that administrators in this study utilize the ethic of justice when making decisions is consistent with previous research (Catacutan & de Guzman 2015; Dempster & Berry, 2003; Eyal, Berkovich, & Schwartz, 2011; Wood & Hilton, 2012). As

established in Chapter 4 though, these were not the only factors that influenced administrators' decision-making, and the ethic of justice was not the only ethic reflected in their answers.

Ethic of critique

Of the four ethics (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2000), ethic of the critique was least evident in the comments of the participants. While participants admitted that laws and rules are not perfect—laws and rules can be vague, in need of change, and even unethical at times—their criticisms typically did not rise to a level consistent with the ethic of critique. The ethic of critique is more than just criticism; it is about confronting social norms and pushing against institutions steeped in power and privilege to bring justice to oppressed populations (Eyal, Berkovich, & Schwartz, 2011; Frick, 2011; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2000). The near-absence of the ethic of critique in this study is consistent with the work of Catacutan and de Guzman (2015) who, when categorizing the decision-making scenarios shared by their participants into one of the four ethics, found that none of the scenarios reflected the ethic of critique.

There could be many reasons for the lack of the ethic of critique. First, Catacutan and de Guzman (2015) proposed that “the age and length of work experience” of their participants may have been a reason for the absence of the ethic of critique (p. 505). Their participants, like mine, were older and later in their careers. Catacutan and de Guzman (2015) suggest that younger practitioners “exhibit higher levels of idealism with respect to their ability to promote social change” whereas later career administrators tend to “be more pragmatic, focus on issues that affect their immediate school context, and overlook broader societal issues typically associated with the utilization of an ethic of critique” (p. 505). Beyond pragmatism, I wonder if simply being immersed in the system for so long makes it harder, in some ways, for administrators to see the flaws and be truly critical of an environment in which they have spent so much of their

lives and that now provides their livelihood. Most participants in my study had their doctorate so with undergraduate studies, master's, and then doctoral work, they likely spent at least ten years as a student in higher education. Furthermore the majority of participants in this study were mid-career, so they had been working in higher education for ten, fifteen, sometimes almost twenty years. Perhaps being a product of the system and then working in it for so long could be one explanation for the lack of the ethic of critique.

Additionally, participants in my study were predominantly White. A similar lack of racial diversity was likely present in the Catacutan and de Guzman (2015) study of Filipino deans. The authors' statement that "there is less racial diversity found among the Filipino people" and the absence of racial information in the demographic profile of respondents suggest that participants may have all been the same race/ethnicity. Given that the ethic of critique is about pushing against power and privilege to bring justice and fairness to minoritized populations, conducting a study with a more racially/ethnically diverse pool of participants, including participants from various minority groups, might elicit a stronger presence of the ethic of critique. It would be interesting to attempt to assess which might have the stronger impact on the presence of an ethic of critique—race/ethnicity or age/years of work experience.

There is another plausible explanation for the lack of the ethic of critique. All the participants in this study work at Division II, comprehensive state universities with mission statements that talk about inclusion and opportunity and commitment to their community. It is possible that administrators working in these settings feel like they and their institutions are already addressing concerns expressed in the ethic of critique, so they did not need to be vocal in their critique of the system. Interviewing administrators at a variety of institution types would be one way to try to assess the influence of this particular factor.

One final explanation for the absence of the ethic of the critique might be that decisions participants chose to discuss and the case studies presented to them just did not contain enough injustice or inequity to stir an ethic of critique. When I first presented the case study about bailing the basketball player out of jail, I did not provide the participants with many details. As the conversation progressed, I shared more facts such as the player was African-American and being held in a jail in a small, pre-dominantly White, rural town in the Midwest. It was this information that provoked the few comments that even hinted at an ethic of critique. Gina stated,

You know, the student in jail scenario, I feel that I am somebody that's kind of in tune with some social justice issues and the racial disparities especially in criminal justice, like I'm in tune with all that, so I could see where my instinct might be "I'm getting you out of here. We're going back to campus. We'll deal with this later" . . . It would be tough, [but] if you truly felt you needed to get that student out of there, with all of those circumstances, then you kind of just do what's right.

Irv made similar comments about the basketball case study as he talked about all of the specific details he would consider.

Other participants also hinted a bit at an ethic of critique by suggesting that there might be something unjust or unethical about a law they were expected to follow. For example, when talking about the travel ban, Anna stated, "my professional ethics and personal ethics and training and education may differ greatly from our laws. So there would be some significant conflict." Similarly, when talking about Title IX Eileen said, "I struggle on a personal ethics side with having to telling somebody, if they're disclosing something painful that happened to them . . . that as an institutional agent I'm obligated to report that." However, after these comments, both participants quickly asserted that despite their uneasiness they felt obligated to abide by the

laws. They did not seem as fully committed to standing up against any injustice or inequity within the law as someone truly employing the ethic of critique might. Interestingly, these comments came in moments of conversation about general decision-making and ethics, not in discussions of their *funnel decisions* or the case studies. It made me wonder if discussing case studies or real life decisions about more ethically charged topics might elicit more explicit expressions of the ethic of critique. In future research if participants were asked to share a very specific type of decision or if the case studies presented to them had specific injustices in them perhaps participants would articulate a stronger ethic of critique.

Ethic of care

Unlike ethic of critique, the ethic of care was demonstrated repeatedly by my participants. The ethic of care focuses on ideas such as treating people well, nurturing, encouraging, and empowering people, responding to need, and establishing, maintaining, and enhancing relationships (Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 2013). Each different aspect of the ethic of care was reflected in various comments made by the participants. For example, in talking about helping the struggling military veteran students described in the second case study, Anna stressed the importance of

trying to show that somebody knows and somebody cares, and trying to get that student to kind of click their on-switch on, to say that I'm ready to be here, and if not, then give them a graceful way to exit and then come back.

Perhaps the most prominently reflected aspect of the ethic of care was establishing and maintaining relationships. As detailed in Chapter 4, people/relationships were very important to participants, and factors in that category were very influential to their decision-making. Numerous participants including Beth, Chad, and Diane specifically listed relationships as a

factor that influenced their *funnel decision*. Helen seemed to speak for many participants when in describing the broad influences on her general decision-making, she said,

It's again [about] the care of the person. There's a relationship there and even if there wasn't a relationship there, I think anybody that works over in our student affairs, they care. I believe they care deeply about our students and our students' success.

A different comment from Helen reflects another aspect of the ethic of care—the desire to move beyond the view that decision-making should be completely governed by adherence to laws, rules, or some type of strict moral code. She stated,

I think we're always guided by rules and laws. But it comes down to the right thing to do always. So these . . . *rules, laws* don't motivate me as much as *the right thing to do*. I always think that care, general care for people [is more important] . . .

Finding that administrators in higher education invoke the ethic of care is consistent with previous research (Catacutan & de Guzman, 2015; Dempster & Berry, 2003; Eyal, Berkovich, & Schwartz, 2011; Hornak & Garza Mitchell, 2016; Wood & Hilton, 2012). It is also consistent with views held by early ethic of care proponent Nel Noddings who saw a crucial connection between this ethic and education (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011). She believed that students should always be at the center of the educational process and that care for children should be the first job of schools (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011). The idea of placing the student at the center is also a crucial component of the next ethic I discuss, ethic of the profession.

Ethic of the profession

The most recently conceptualized of the four ethics, ethic of the profession was developed by Shapiro and Stefkovich (2000) to explain some of the considerations and influences unique to decision-making within the profession of education, which they felt were

absent in the other ethics. Ethic of the profession integrates ideas such as standards of the profession, personal and professional codes of ethics, and best interests of the students into one framework (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011). These components of ethic of the profession are closely aligned to multiple categories of influential factors identified by participants. Specifically, I would include the categories of students and professional identity within this ethic. Originally, the ethic of the profession was conceptualized with the K–12 system in mind. However, like Catacutan and de Guzman (2015), I found it extremely relevant to administrators in higher education as well.

The influence of the ethic of the profession was evident in many comments made by my participants. Many participants put students at the bottom of their funnel as the most influential factor in their decision-making. They talked about putting students first and prioritizing students when factors conflicted. One quote from Helen also reflected the integration of several other individual pieces that Shapiro and Stefkovich (2011) included within ethic of the profession. While discussing factors she included in her funnel and how they connected to her overall decision-making, Helen said,

If I had to put them in order of pushing me to a decision, I think those three—professional code of conduct, personal ethics, past education and training—are closely related to what I think is the final [piece], the long term effect of the decisions on the student athlete.

Others also made connections between their ethics and students thus supporting the idea of an ethic of the profession. For example, Irv stated that for him

personal ethics . . . being ethical and why you make decisions, [it's] not for my own personal gain. I'll work the extra hours, and I'll do whatever it takes to make it work for

students . . . I try to make sure that students are able to accomplish what they want to do within the reasonable limits of stuff.

Similarly, when trying to define personal ethics, Chad said it is doing “what’s right.” He added, I think that’s the same for me as do what’s right for kids, do what’s right for young people . . . What’s best for them to be successful, or them to be happy, or them to enjoy their experience.

Randall was perhaps the most emphatic in stating beliefs that reflect the ethic of the profession. He stated, “we have an ethical responsibility to ensure that our students have what they need to be successful and be retained at our institution. I think that’s an ethical issue.”

Best interest of the student. Clearly doing what is best for students is important to the higher education administrators in this study. This finding lines up well with the ethic of the profession. In fact, in defining this ethic, Shapiro and Stefkovich (2011) centered the idea of “the best interests of the student” at the heart of their model. However, by their own admission, “best interests of the students” is an ill-defined term/concept (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011). One conceptualization they mentioned, developed by Stefkovich and Begley (2007), suggests that best interests of the student is made up of three Rs: rights, responsibility, and respect. Many of my participants’ comments about students and what is in their best interest tie quite nicely into this conceptualization and two of the Rs in particular—rights and responsibilities.

Within the “students” category of influential factors identified in Chapter 4, one recurring idea was student development. Participants expressed the desire to help students learn and grow. They also felt it was important to hold students accountable for their actions, to help them understand the consequences of their actions, and to teach them to take responsibility for those actions. All of these ideas connect well to the piece of best interest of the student that Stefkovich

and Begley (2007) called responsibilities. In detailing this R, they included things like “the teachable moment” and “growth” that mirror the ideas expressed by participants.

Perhaps even more salient than participants’ desire to see students learn and grow was their desire to keep students safe. Safety came up in nine of the eleven interviews, and as described in Chapter 4, it was often stated as the top priority/number one concern. These results suggest that student safety is a crucial part of the way higher education administrators conceptualize best interests of the students. While K–12 administrators are also likely to be concerned with student safety especially given the number of school shootings this year (Baird, 2018), it is arguably a more pressing concern for higher education administrators. After all, many colleges and universities are responsible for students 24/7 and are in charge of not only where/how students learn but also where/how they eat, sleep, and socialize. Although the idea of *in loco parentis* went out decades ago (Hirt, 2006; Lake, 2001; Simmons, 2012), there is still a sense of responsibility in administrators and an expectation that they keep students safe (Lake, 2001). In today’s world, the challenges to meeting that expectation are significant. Given the increasing numbers of mass shootings, both on and off campuses, the changing campus-carry laws, the staggering number of sexual assaults on campuses, and the headline-grabbing incidents of death due to hazing, higher education administrators are justifiably worried about how to keep students safe. There are also safety concerns within sanctioned university events such as national and international trips for intercollegiate athletics and study abroad experiences. Given all that, it is understandable why administrators in this study repeatedly mentioned student safety as a primary concern. Interestingly, while Stefkovich and Begley (2007) include the right to be free from bodily harm, they were not talking about student safety in the same way as my participants. Perhaps reflecting the fact that ethic of the profession was conceived predominantly for the K–12

system, Stefkovich and Begley (2007) only discussed this freedom in terms of freedom from corporal punishment. None of my participants mentioned corporal punishment at all, yet they were extremely focused on keeping students safe. These different outlooks on the right to be free from bodily harm point to a shortcoming in the application of the concepts of ethic of the profession and best interest of the student. I believe that the concept of the best interest of the student that is at the heart of the ethic of the profession should be expanded to reflect this concern for student safety.

Another right emphasized by some participants was the overall right to education. For example, Helen put it very simply when she said “public education to me is about access. So maybe that's part of my personal ethics. It's about access to education.” Randall, on the other hand, went into great detail on his feelings on this subject. After explaining that he felt ensuring students' success and their retention at the institution was an ethical issue, he said,

It goes to that argument that is higher education a right or a privilege, and so when you see it as a privilege then maybe there's no ethics that go along with it because . . . we are giving you something. But I don't agree with that position. The position I have is . . . education is a right. To tell people that you can't come is problematic for me, but once they choose to come, then we have a responsibility to help them be successful. And sometimes we don't take that responsibility as high as we should. So me, I try to do the best I can to make sure that that responsibility is at the forefront of everybody that I engage with, but I also know that's not always the case. So I'm challenged there, and some folks . . . don't see it as an ethical issue. They just see it as well they're here. If they make it, they do, or they don't.

Later he continued,

I'll give this example. We've admitted student A who maybe comes underprepared and we knew student A is underprepared. If we don't give student A the necessary support to help them be successful or we make them figure it out on their own, I think we do that student a disservice and I think . . . it's a reflection of our ethic as an institution meaning if we're calling ourselves an opportunity campus or an opportunity institution . . . We have to be sure that we really give them the opportunity and not just see them as generating revenue and/or receiving state subsidy because we've admitted them. We have to really . . . be intentional about that, build it into our culture, build it into every[thing]. . . if we don't do that, I think we're being unethical as an institution because we are . . . we're telling the student "ok, figure it out." That's a problem for me. I really do have a problem with that.

Clearly, he was quite passionate about the idea of access to education being a right of students and a crucial component of what is in their best interest. This outlook fits well with Stefkovich and Begley's (2007) second R, rights. Included in this are legal rights and human rights as identified by various governmental and non-governmental entities. Education as a fundamental right and an ethical obligation is also included under rights, and my participants seemed to support those beliefs about education.

Overall, even with the oversight of not including student safety in the best interest of the student, my results suggest that the ethic of the profession is a highly valuable paradigm for higher education administrators. This finding is consistent with other research (Catacutan & de Guzman, 2015; Eyal, Berkovich, & Schwartz, 2011). However, ethic of the profession was not the only influential paradigm. Without ever stating it outright, participants seemed to be demonstrating a multi-paradigm approach.

Multi-paradigm approach

The situations faced by higher education administrators are often complex and challenging. When addressing these situations, Shapiro and Stefkovich “advocate a multiple paradigm approach that crosses over and combines various approaches to ethics,” and they suggest utilizing ideas across the four ethics to make decisions (2001, p. 6). The comments made by my participants and the factors they said influenced their decisions reflect this multi-paradigm approach. In their funnel, each participant listed factors related to at least two of the ethics, and several participants made connections to three of the four ethics.

Although participants connected with multiple ethics as they navigated their decision-making, ethic of the profession seemed especially meaningful to them. In particular, students were of paramount importance to many of these administrators. Additionally, when conflicts arose or when certain situational factors pressed on their decision-making, participants frequently prioritized the best interests of the student/ethic of the profession. Eyal, Berkovich, and Schwartz (2011) hypothesized that when facing conflicts, high school administrators prioritized certain ethics over others, specifically ethic of care and ethics of the profession over the other two. My results suggest that college and university administrators also engage in such prioritization, and the ethic of the profession is often their paradigm of choice.

While ethic of the profession may be the go-to priority for administrators managing conflicting influential factors in their decision-making, it is important to note that it was not the end-all, be-all answer particularly because the core of ethic of the profession, “best interest of the student,” is such a vague concept. Even if we take into account the three Rs (Stefkovich & Begley, 2007) and student safety, best interest of the student is still a moving target that is hard to define. My participants’ comments seemed to reflect this shifting definition. One minute it

was best to leave the student in the case study in jail to think about what he had done, thus holding him accountable for his mistake and teaching him a lesson. The next minute it was more important to get him out of jail to protect his safety. Some participants felt upholding the rule, once they knew about it, and not bailing the student out was most important. Others felt that more pressing concerns might take priority over the rule. How then do we account for these various and shifting views? I believe there are certain factors specific to each decision-making situation that influence how administrators define best interest of the student, how they utilize ethic of the profession and the other ethics, and even which one will be their default ethical outlook. I believe Jones' (1991) moral intensity framework helps explain those situational factors.

Connections to Jones' Framework of Moral Intensity

One of the categories of influential factors that emerged from my data was the situation. It was through discussions of factors related to this category that participants acknowledged and highlighted the fact that there are certain unique details in each decision-making situation that can be influential. One framework for addressing those situational factors comes from Thomas Jones (1991). Jones (1991) argued that situational, decision-specific factors could not be discounted, and in particular, he asserted that the moral intensity of each particular decision would influence the decision-maker. Specifically, he identified six components of moral intensity—"magnitude of consequences, social consensus, probability of effect, temporal immediacy, proximity, and concentration of effect"—that he believed impact ethical decision-making (Jones, 1991, p. 372). In simplest terms, Jones (1991) defined these components, respectively, as the number of people impacted by the decision, what others will think of the decision, how likely the consequences of the decision are to happen, how quickly the

consequences will occur, how close the decision-maker feels to those affected by the decision, and how concentrated/intense the consequences of the decision are. My participants seemed most influenced by two of the components: magnitude of consequences and temporal immediacy. Two other components, probability of effect and social consensus, also seemed to influence administrative decision-making.

As indicated in Chapter 4, participants considered the number of people impacted by their decisions and, therefore, the magnitude of the consequences of their decisions. For example, Helen stated that “[t]he number of people it impacts come [in] to it.” Similarly Anna said, “it depends on the numbers.” These participants and others provided several examples of how this played out in their thinking. Additionally, magnitude of consequences is about more than just numbers. Even if only one person is affected by a decision, there can still be a magnitude of the consequences. Will the person die, be severely injured, or be slightly injured? This idea seemed to be a consideration for some participants as they reflected on whether or not the student-athlete in the case would be safe in jail.

Also apparent in the discussions about the case study of the student-athlete in jail were concerns for probability of effect. Initial, minor concerns regarding the student-athlete’s safety while in jail were amplified when additional details about the race of the athlete (African American) and the racial make-up of the town in which he was arrested (predominantly White) were shared with participants. Given the numerous incidents of racialized police brutality our society has seen in recent years, it is not surprising that once participants knew the details of the case they seemed to anticipate an increase in the probability of effect, in this case the effect of something bad happening to the student-athlete while in jail. Several participants indicated that

this information would make their decisions about whether or not to follow the rules and leave the student-athlete in jail a much more challenging decision.

Another situational factor that influenced participants was time or timing. Several participants mentioned considering how quickly the decision had to be made and/or executed. In particular, Gina highlighted the fact that, at her institution, there are time restrictions for utilizing certain disciplinary actions. Time of year was also a factor for some participants. For example, the time of the school year influenced Irv's decision about not allowing the color run. While Jones's definition of temporal immediacy was tied to the "length of time between the present and the onset of the consequences" of the decision (1991, p. 376), I argue for an expansion of that definition to include things like the temporal immediacy of making the decision itself and the relative timing of the consequences of the decision. For example, a decision to fire 100 workers might be more acceptable in July than on December 25th, just as a color run at a different time of the semester would have been more acceptable to Irv. I also believe the temporal immediacy of others finding out about a decision is influential, an idea I discuss further later in this section due to its connection to social consensus.

Although the words "social consensus" were never used in any of the interviews, its influence on administrative decision-making was evident in a number of ways. At its most basic, social consensus focuses on what other people think of this decision. In other words, what is the public perception? Two participants, Anna and Helen, talked about public perception spurring them to action in certain situations. Diane, Sharon, and Irv all talked about contemplating how their decisions might play out in the newspaper. For Beth, public opinion was even a "small factor" in her *funnel decision* (reporting an NCAA violation that resulted in the university losing out on a very good football player). The player in question likely would have made the team

stronger, and Beth knew people would be upset about losing him. What others would think of their decision was clearly on the minds of the participants. Jones (1991) defined social consensus as “the degree of social agreement that a proposed act is evil (or good)” (p. 375), and while none of the participants saw their decisions as evil, there was certainly a sense of concern regarding that “degree of social agreement” about their decisions.

I also argue that there is an additional important aspect of social consensus that Jones could not have anticipated given his framework was developed in 1991. I believe that media/social media strongly factors into social consensus. Of course, there was media in 1991; newspapers, television, and radio were all around, but the internet/world wide web had just barely come into existence. Jones had no way to anticipate the broad reach and instantaneous nature of social media. This is where I connect the ideas of social consensus and temporal immediacy. It is not just about how people will feel when they find out about a decision but also how quickly they find out and how quickly and intensely they voice their support for or opposition to a decision. Although participants were hesitant to say that social media actually influenced decisions they would make in a situation, they did acknowledge that it affected how they would communicate their decision—how quickly, by what means, and to whom.

One other point some participants made related to social consensus, temporal immediacy, and social media was about the visibility of college athletics and how that might be an influence on decision-making. When thinking about the potential differences in decision-making if the student in jail in the case study was a member of the environmental club rather than a student-athlete, Beth said,

There’s that level of visibility . . . people follow [sports] . . . they’re not gonna know every member of the environmental club, but they’re gonna know the starting people on

the basketball team. So there's gonna be that public opinion . . . because if it was a beloved member of the team, and the president just left them back, that's gonna have a huge impact on the public opinion, or if that student-athlete has a bad reputation, and everybody's like "oh yeah that just happened again. We expected that from him." Those are determining factors that you would probably want to think about. Should they be factors? Maybe not, but they are.

For Helen, an athletic administrator, this idea of visibility was not just tied to the basketball case study but was connected to her broader decision-making. She stated that

athletics is a very visible part of the university. I'm ever conscious of that . . . [as] the leader that ensures that we're playing by the rules and doing all the things that lead to the overall care of the student athlete.

It is worth noting again that all the institutions represented by participants in this study were Division II institutions, not Division I. For institutions competing at the Division I level, the visibility of athletics is magnified exponentially; public opinion is, therefore, intensified, and the weight of social consensus compounded.

There is another issue that might be especially true at Division I institutions, although arguably it affects all upper level administrators in higher education. This issue centers around the fact that administrators are not just making decisions for themselves, but rather for the institution. Public perception of that decision relates then not just to the individual but also to the institution and its reputation. I believe there is a strong connection between public opinion, institutional reputation, and administrative decision-making that needs to be explored. In fact, I think there is a great need for future research on the influence of both temporal immediacy and

social consensus/public opinion, as played out in media/social media, on institutional reputation and administrative decision-making.

Overall, participants identified many situation-specific factors that were influential to their decision-making, and much of that influence can be explained by looking at those situational factors through Jones' (1991) framework for moral intensity. I argue that joining Jones' framework with the idea of the four ethics (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2000) is an incredibly valuable way to gain more insight into the influences on decision-making of administrators in higher education. While the four ethics and the factors that relate to them explain much about what influences administrative decision-making, they do not account for everything. Accounting for the unique, situational influences on decision-making is important, and Jones' (1991) framework of moral intensity does that in an extremely relevant way.

Implications for Theory

This research has several implications for theory. First, to a point, it supports Shapiro and Stefkovich's (2011) argument for the use of multi-paradigm approach to decision-making. Of the eight categories of factors identified in Chapter 4 that influence administrative decision-making, several can be easily mapped on to the framework of the four ethics (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2000) (see Figure 4 below). First, the category of process/regulations reflects the ethic of justice. Second, the category of people/relationships reflects the ethic of care. Two different categories are tied to the ethic of the professions: students and professional identity.

Because the factors are not always exclusive of each other (students are also people, relationships with coworkers or bosses are tied to the institution, etc.), the ethics they reflect are also connected and overlap (in ways not entirely depicted in Figure 4). Additionally, ethic of care and ethic of the profession have a strong theoretical connection—the idea of keeping students at

the center of decision-making. Furthermore, another category of influential factors, do the right thing/personal ethics, weaves throughout all of the four ethics. All of these connections and overlapping ideas are more support for a multi-paradigm approach to decision-making. As a group, my participants' comments reflected aspects of three of the four ethics in their decision-making, and individually, every participant included, in their funnel, factors that related to at least two of the four ethics. Although ethic of critique was least apparent here, I believe more research is needed before excluding it completely.

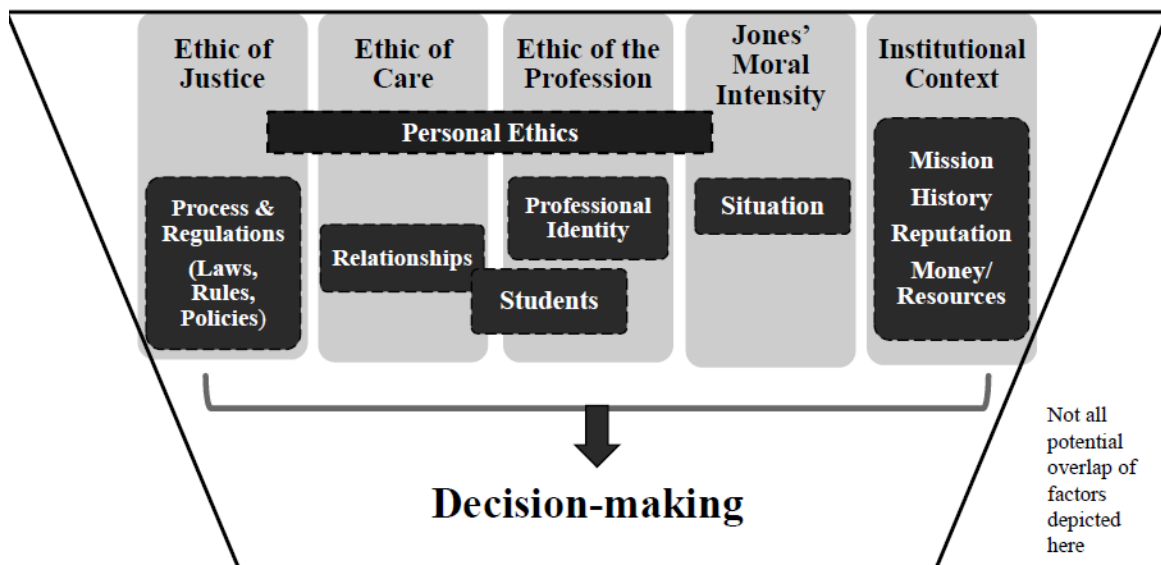


Figure 4. Enhanced multi-paradigm approach

Regarding ethic of the profession, my results suggest one important addition, specifically to the idea of best interest of the student, which is at its center. Student safety was of paramount importance to my participants, and given the current nature of our society, it is reasonable to assume that it is important to other higher education administrators. Therefore, I argue that student safety needs to be included within any definitions of best interest of the student.

In addition to adding student safety to the definition of best interest of the student so that the ethic of the profession more accurately reflects the concerns of administrators, my results suggest that using only the four ethics is not enough. In later publications, Shapiro and Gross (2013) suggested pairing the Multiple Ethical Paradigms approach (the four ethics) with Turbulence Theory, which provides a framework for understanding environmental/institutional conditions related to institutional change and the uncertainty and disharmony that may accompany that change. Rather than including Turbulence Theory, I argue that pairing the four ethics with Jones' (1991) framework of moral intensity is more appropriate for understanding individual decision-making; Jones' framework accounts for situational influences on decision-making within education more clearly and specifically. For example, when my participants talked about decision making was influenced by the number of people affected by the decision, they demonstrated the influence of Jones' magnitude of consequences. Similarly when they discussed the influence of media/social media/public opinion on their decisions, they were indicating a concern for Jones's social consensus. In addition to magnitude of the consequences and social consensus, issues of temporal immediacy and probability of effect also seemed to influence the decision-making of participants. Influences of proximity and concentration of effect were not evident in the data, but further research should be conducted before completely dismissing the influence of these situational factors.

I also argue that certain aspects of Jones' (1991) framework need to be updated to reflect the current nature of our society. In particular I think definitions of social consensus and temporal immediacy need to take into account the current role media/social in our society. Another tweak I suggest for this framework is to acknowledge that it is the decision-maker's perceptions/beliefs about these things (temporal immediacy, probability of effect, etc.) that is

more important than the actual reality. For example, when discussing the first case study, if, for some reason, the participant believed that there was a high likelihood of the student-athlete being physically abused in jail, he/she likely decided not to leave the student in that situation but rather bail him out. It did not matter if the student-athlete actually would have been safe or not. The **perception** was he would not be safe, and therefore it influenced the decision.

Together the six categories of factors already discussed in this section, and the theoretical frameworks to which they are connected, cover much of what administrators indicated was influential to their decision-making. However, two categories of influential factors, institutional context and money/other resources, did not map on to either the four ethics (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2000) or Jones' (1991) moral intensity. Arguably various aspects of the frameworks touch on money/other resources or institutional context. For example, ideas of fairness or greatest good from the ethic of justice might suggest to an administrator how to distribute resources. Likewise, the ethic of the profession might point an administrator toward spending money on something in the best interest of students as opposed to a raise for administration. Additionally, administrators might consider the magnitude of the consequences or the temporal immediacy of a tuition increase before enacting it. There may even be a connection between an administrator's professional identity and the mission and history of the institution at which they work. However, the categories of money/other resources and institutional context seemed too big to just tack on to either framework. Instead, an additional theoretical framework may need to be considered to account for the influence of institutional context and money/other resources on decision-making. The most fitting theory may come from economics, organizational theory, or resource management; however, I have not yet determined what the appropriate framework might be.

While institutional context and money/other resources were important influences, they were not the only factors that influenced decision-making of the administrators in this study. Therefore, no matter which framework is chosen to explain the influence of institutional context and money/other resources on decision-making, it will not be stand-alone. Rather, as illustrated in Figure 4, it would be an additional component in a multi-paradigm approach to decision-making.

In addition to supporting the use of a multi-paradigm approach to decision-making, my findings also suggest that administrators handle conflicts between the factors influencing their decision by prioritizing one factor over others. Although future research is needed explore exactly how or why any one factor is prioritized, I suspect it is connected to the influence of Jones' (1991) framework for moral intensity. I believe the various aspects of moral intensity act as a filter through which administrators process the situation and the factors weighing on their decision. Based on the perceived moral intensity of the situation, administrators decide which factor or factors to prioritize and then arrive at their final decision. To pull together the expanded multi-paradigm approach and account for role I suspect moral intensity is playing, I created my own framework to explain administrative decision-making in higher education (see Figure 5).

Overall, my research supports the applicability of the theoretical frameworks of the four ethics (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2000) and Jones's (1991) moral intensity to decision-making by higher education administrators. More specifically, though, it suggests the application of an even broader approach to decision-making than the one advocated by Shapiro and Stefkovich (2011). To be more inclusive of all the factors that administrators say influence their decisions, an enhanced multi-paradigmatic approach would need to include the idea of the four ethics, Jones' (1991) framework for moral intensity, and an additional framework to account for the influence

of institutional context and money/resources. Furthermore, I believe moral intensity (Jones, 1991) plays a very specific role in resolving conflicts between factors influencing decision-making and in helping administrators arrive at their final decision. Overall, what my framework reiterates is a point reflected in my data as well as past research (Catacutan & de Guzman, 2015; Dempster & Berry, 2003; Eyal, Berkovich, & Schwartz, 2011; Wood & Hilton, 2012)—administrative decision-making in higher education is a complex, multi-faceted endeavor and numerous often conflicting factors press on administrative decision-making.

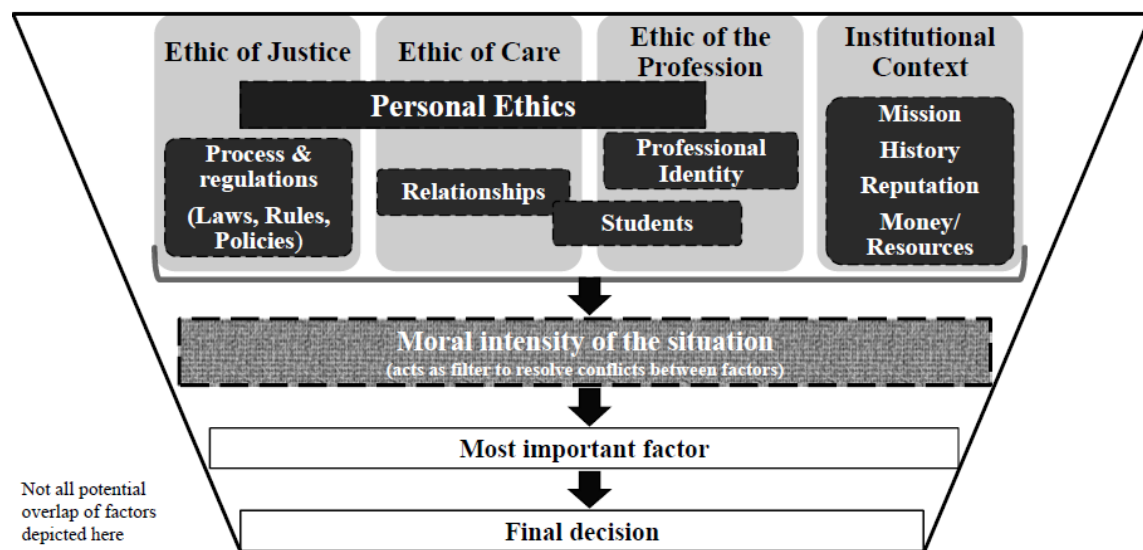


Figure 5. Allmendinger framework for decision-making

Future Research

Given the lack of research that has been conducted about ethics and decision-making in higher education administration, this study takes a solid first step toward filling the gap in the literature. I was fortunate enough to interview eleven very cooperative and reflective participants. They eagerly engaged in the hands-on activity and gave very thoughtful answers to each of my questions. Their responses allowed me to identify eight categories of factors that influence administrative decision-making in higher educations, many of which map on well to

existing theoretical frameworks for ethical decision-making. However, eleven people clearly do not speak for all administrators in higher education. There is much work left to be done.

One particularly interesting avenue of future research would be to conduct this study with a wider variety of participants. For example, all of the participants in this study worked in either student affairs or intercollegiate athletics. Interviewing administrators on the academic affairs side of the house and in other administrative roles would provide a more complete picture of administrative decision-making. I would be quite interested to know if these administrators consider the same factors as my participants and if they place the same weight/priority on the same specific factors as did my participants. Additionally, administrators in this study were mostly mid-career, predominantly White, and predominantly female. They all also worked at the same institution type (Division II, state comprehensive universities) within the same state. Although placing the institutional and state parameters was intentional for the reasons described in Chapter 3, exploring this research with Division I and III administrators, community college administrators, liberal arts administrators, and administrators at religious institutions in various states would be interesting. One hypothesis is that certain factors might weigh more heavily on administrators at different types of institutions. In particular, when asked at the end of the interview if there was anything about higher education, decision-making, and ethics not covered that needed to be discussed, several participants voiced concerns about the influence of money/other resources and media/social media on Division I athletics. Given the scandals in recent years at institutions such as Penn State (Chappell, 2012), North Carolina (Blythe, 2017), Louisville (Tracy, 2018), and Michigan State (Dator, 2018; Lessenberry, 2018; Wolcott, 2018) and the current FBI investigation into college basketball (Rapaport, 2017), those concerns are

clearly warranted. Attempting to gain a better understanding of decision-making by administrators at that level would be an interesting, but likely deeply challenging undertaking.

Another change in the participants could yield different results. In analyzing the absence of the ethic of critique, I raised issues about the participants' age/years of experience as well as their race/ethnicity. It would be interesting to conduct this study with younger, less experienced higher education professionals as well as with a more racially diverse group of experienced administrators. Utilizing case studies with obvious inequities or power issues or asking participants to discuss other types of decisions such as human resources decisions about hiring or firing, for example, or decisions related to race-conscious admissions might also be a way to see if the ethic of critique ever plays a significantly influential role on administrative decision-making in higher education.

Regardless of whether the future research described above is my own or someone else's, I believe the hands-on funnel tool described in Chapter 3 is an extremely helpful way to engage participants in reflective conversations about complex and potentially sensitive topics such as ethics and decision-making. Writing on the circles, talking about the circles, and moving them around in the funnel seemed to help participants remember more specifics than they shared in the initial description of their tough decision. They remembered additional influential factors as they wrote and talked, and they were especially able to reflect on the connections and conflicts between factors as they moved them around the funnel. Having the funnel and all the factors out in front of participants while talking about the case studies also proved helpful. It seemed to prompt consideration of additional factors and the interactions of those factors as participants reflected on what they would do in each of the cases. Other techniques that add a visual and/or manual aspect to the interviews (i.e., drawing, journaling, or even photo elicitation) also serve a

similar function when paired with an interview; they increase participants' level of comfort and assist them in engaging in more thorough recollection and reflection (Harper, 2002; Khorshidi & Mohammadipour, 2016; Ogina, 2012; Rouse, 2014). I strongly recommend pairing a hands-on/visual devise, tool, or technique with the standard question and answer interview; it can really lead to a much deeper dive into complex and/or potentially sensitive topics.

Implications for Practice

Administrators in higher education do not need a research study to tell them that decision-making is complex. They live that complexity every day. Hopefully, this study provides administrators with a reminder to think broadly when making decisions. My eleven participants identified 150 factors in eight categories that influenced their decision-making, and that is certainly not an exhaustive list. Sometimes though, for whatever reason, administrators get a bit of tunnel vision when making decisions. Perhaps they feel rushed to make the decision and do not think they have time to consider all the factors, or perhaps one factor seems so important or influential that administrators cannot or do not consider other potential influences, even their own ethics. They may even feel pressured politically to arrive at a certain decision. Hopefully, seeing so many potential influences detailed here encourages administrators to fully consider the vast range of potentially influential factors when making a decision. In other words, I hope they will take an enhanced multi-paradigm approach. More specifically, I believe that considering all of the factors included in my new framework could help administrators gain a more complete picture of a situation before making their decision.

Rather than providing a list of questions to consider when making a decision or some kind of simplistic process for decision-making as some researchers have done in the past (e.g., Oliver & Hioco, 2012; Santovec, 2013), I provide administrators with a hands-on tool they could

use on a daily basis, particularly if they are struggling with a decision. As detailed above, the funnel activity was a helpful way for participants to think through a past decision already made. It allowed them to remember details and to consider the ways various factors influenced their decision-making, how those factors interacted and conflicted, and how they prioritized those factors. Similarly, the funnel could also be helpful as administrators consider a current or future decision they need to make. If they are not sure what factors they need to consider, they could use the preprinted options to spark their thinking. If they already have numerous factors being considered, they could write those down in the blank circles and use the funnel to help them decide which factors are the most important.

One way to get administrators to utilize my framework and to get the funnel into their hands is to create a professional development workshop based on this dissertation. In 2003, Dempster and Berry suggested there was “ample room for improving access to, and participation in, professional development programs that focus on ethical responsibilities and decision-making” (p. 466). Fifteen years later, I argue that is still true. I have already had an opportunity to present several student workshops on ethics and decision-making, and I even taught a one-credit, masters level seminar on the same topic. Adapting the content for administrators would be relatively simple and could help fill a gap in the training received by higher education administrators.

One additional implication for practice relates to both the people versus policy conflicts described above as well as participants’ strong desire to keep students safe. While having rules is important, I think the NCAA and NJCAA need to consider the significance of administrators putting students, and particularly student safety, first in their decision-making. For example, having a rule that states no one associated with the institution can bail a student-athlete out of jail

seems like a good way to prevent coaches or athletic directors from giving special treatment and benefits to athletes who commit crimes. However, the situation with the student-athlete arrested in the post-game brawl reveals an instance where the rule conflicted with many other factors the administrator considered. His explanations to the press suggest that the rule conflicted with his view of the right thing to do, with the way he thought he should do his job (his professional identity), and with his ability to keep the student-athlete safe (Cosentino, 2013). Perhaps the rules, or at least the consequences for breaking the rules, should offer a modicum of flexibility to allow administrators some discretion to prioritize student-safety in certain situations.

Summary/Closing

Having been an administrator in both student affairs and intercollegiate athletics, I have certainly been disturbed by the many scandals and examples of “bad” decision-making that have plagued college and university administrators in recent years. Beyond those incidents though, I know how much impact administrative decisions, both “good” and “bad,” can have on students, and I know that often it is not clear how administrators arrive at their decisions. I did this study because I believe it is important to get a clearer understanding of how administrators in higher education make those decisions—what factors influence their decisions, how they handle conflicts between the factors, and what role their personal ethics play in their decision-making. For the administrators in this study, factors within the categories of students, the institution, people/relationships, process/regulations, money/other resources, professional identity, the situation, and the right thing to do/personal ethics influenced their decisions. These administrators in intercollegiate athletics and student affairs demonstrated a multi-paradigmatic approach to ethical decision-making, and when influential factors conflicted, the administrators often prioritized the ethic of the profession, placing the best interest of the students at the heart of

their decision-making. At this point it is not possible to say if administrators in other departments or at other institutions are influenced by the same factors or if they prioritize influential factors in a similar way. There is much research left to do in order to understand administrative decision-making in higher education and the role of personal ethics in that decision-making, but I am hopeful that this study is a step toward that understanding.

EPILOGUE

Although the idea for this dissertation began to form almost five years ago and the proposal was submitted, data collected, transcripts analyzed, and chapters drafted before the Larry Nassar trials began (see Chappell, 2012; Dator, 2018; Lessenberry, 2018 for more information on Nassar scandal), it would be completely remiss of me to publish a dissertation on ethics and decision-making in higher education without acknowledging what is going on at this time. Like almost everyone, I am stunned and horrified by the whole situation. While most people would like their dissertations to be timely and relevant, I never wished or anticipated that mine would be this much so.

Numerous scandals have hit higher education in the last several years, and many had something to do with intercollegiate athletics at large universities. The lawsuit against the University of North Carolina for years of academic fraud and the FBI investigation into corruption in college basketball were bad enough (Blythe, 2017; Rapaport, 2017), but they were not Penn State, and I had deeply hoped there would never again be another Penn State. Unfortunately, we are living through something much worse here at Michigan State. In fact it is being called “perhaps the worst scandal in higher education history” (Lessenberry, 2018). The number of young girls and women abused by Nassar may be 20 to 25 times the number of boys abused by Jerry Sandusky (Chappell, 2012; Dator, 2018). While those numbers are staggering enough by themselves, the full scope of this tragedy is still playing out. Even as I write this epilogue, more and more survivors are coming forward and the fall-out from the scandal continues to spread. At this time, four Michigan State employees have retired or resigned in the wake of the scandal: gymnastics coach Kathy Klages, university president Lou Anna K. Simon, athletic director Mark Hollis, and general counsel Bob Noto (Dator, 2018; Wolcott, 2018).

Pressure is being put on the Michigan State Board of Trustees to resign, and MSU is under investigation from at least six different entities including the NCAA, the state's Attorney General, and U.S. Department of Education. Additional implications and consequences extend well beyond the MSU campus. For example, the entire board of USA Gymnastics resigned, and the Karoli Ranch, the famed training camp for Olympic gymnastics, closed (Sanchez, 2018; Yan, 2018). The situation changes daily as additional information is revealed, and the final impact will not be known for years. It took nearly six years for Penn State administrators to be sentenced to jail time for their part in covering up the Jerry Sandusky abuse (Sanchez & Cummings, 2017)

What we do know is that this scandal was the result of the terrible actions of one sick individual and the poor decision-making and staggering inaction of an untold number of people both inside and outside of higher education. That is, of course, where my research connects to this situation, and yet, my findings do not explain how or why something like this could happen. What my research does suggest though is that understanding the decision-making that leads to such scandals may come down to understanding what influential factor or factors administrators prioritize and why they prioritize those particular factors.

My participants described numerous factors influencing their decision-making, and they repeatedly emphasized the complexity of that decision-making. Students, institutional context, people/relationships, process/regulations, money/other resources, professional identity, the situation, and the right thing to do/personal ethics were all identified as influential factors. Participants also identified a variety of conflicts that arose between those factors. Resolving those conflicts typically meant prioritizing a certain factor or factors (and, therefore, a certain ethic or ethics) over others. Frequently, though not always, participants discussed prioritizing students and their safety, thereby revealing a reliance on the ethic of the profession. So then, are

my participants saints and the administrators at Michigan State (and Penn State) monsters with no ethics? Of course not. Instead I argue that the latter are administrators who allowed a certain factor or factors to outweigh others in influencing their decision-making. For example, they may have thought they were prioritizing their institution in some way; however, the long-term consequences faced by the institutions implicated in these scandals suggest otherwise.

As indicated throughout this dissertation, my participants worked at NCAA Division II, state comprehensive universities. They did not work at Division I, large research universities. With so many scandals in higher education taking place at these massive, Division I institutions, I believe it is time to analyze what could be causing decision-making at these universities to be different from other places. As I suggested in Chapter 5, there may be something related to social consensus/public opinion, media/media social media, institutional reputation, and administrative decision-making. The money/other resources associated with Division I institutions, and with their athletic programs in particular, also likely influence administrators. Furthermore, I think there is something about massive institutions, poor communication, and the diffusion of responsibility that influences decision-making in a negative way.

Unfortunately I do not have the answers for how to stop these scandals. At this time I am not even sure if the research that might help us understand and prevent poor decision-making that leads to such scandals can be done. Could researchers gain access to the top administrators in these institutions? Would researchers be able to cut through the socially acceptable, public relations answers these administrators might offer and get to the truth about how and why decisions are made? I do not know. What I do know is that there has never been a more important time to take a closer look at decision-making in higher education and the role of personal ethics in that decision-making, and that is what I tried to do with this dissertation.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol (Final)

Introduction:

Hello. Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. As you know, my name is Michelle Allmendinger. I am a doctoral candidate at Michigan State University. Today I will be interviewing you as part of my dissertation. As you may remember from my introductory email, the goal of my dissertation is to understand how administrators in intercollegiate athletics and student affairs make decisions, how they manage the multiple, often-conflicting, factors that influence their decision-making and the role that personal ethics plays in that decision-making. With your permission, I will be audio recording the interview and photographing your written work. Please remember that your identity will be protected.

In order to participate in this study, you must give informed consent. Please read the consent form, and sign it to indicate your willingness to participate in the study. [Have them sign the consent form.]

Interview questions

1. Please tell me your current job title, how long you have been in that role, and briefly describe the career path that you traveled to get to your current position.
2. In your role as [insert current job title], I'm sure you make numerous administrative decisions each day. I'd like you to think for a moment about a specific tough decision you had to make involving or impacting a student or students and then think about all of the factors that potentially influenced that decision and how those factors interacted in your mind as you made the decision.

- a. Please describe the situation/decision. (and why it was tough)
 - b. [Give them the blank circles] Please write down the factors that influenced your decision. After you finish writing, please explain the different factors – what they mean, how they impacted the decision, etc.
 - i. Is there a certain order in which you consider them?
 - ii. Are the factors equally important? [Have them put their circles in the funnel based on weight of influence, heaviest at the bottom. Take photo]
 - iii. What do you do when factors conflict?
 - c. Now – please take a look at these other potential influences on decision-making.
 - i. Talk about what these factors mean to you and if any of them played into your decision-making. [Have them place those that did in the funnel. Take photo.]
 - ii. What about the items that didn't go into the funnel? Is there a reason these don't play into your decisions?
3. Now think about other decisions besides this specific one. In your general decision-making:
 - a. Do the same factors play into your decision-making in the same order?
 - b. Do any of the factors change depending how big of a decision it is, how many people it will affect, how quickly the decision needs, etc.
4. Are there any specific questions you ask yourself when making a decision? Any personal code or “rule of thumb” you adhere to? [If yes, please describe]
5. What does personal ethics mean to you? How do you define ethics? [I will one ask questions 5 and 6 if they haven't come up in previous answers.]

6. How do you define an ethical decision? An unethical one?
7. Are there any specific institutional contexts, laws, rules, etc. that you feel force administrators into making an unethical decision? [If yes, please describe.]
8. Are there any circumstances under which you would ever intentionally go against a rule or a law (if you felt ethically that was the right thing to do)? Please describe the circumstances. (If they say no, ask why not.)
9. I'd like to tell you about a situation a few years ago involving a community college basketball game. During the game, there was a brawl. Because of the brawl, one of the visiting player's was arrested for assaulting a fan who had come onto the floor. The visiting team's president had made the trip to the game and bailed the player out of jail and took him back to campus.
 - a. Have you heard of this instance?
 - b. Would you have done the same thing in the president's shoes? Why or why not?
 - c. Any college personnel bailing an athlete out of jail is against NCAA/NJCAA rules and comes with consequences [In this case, it cost the visiting team, which was ranked third in the country at the time, the chance to participate in post season play.] Were you aware of this rule? Would that affect the decision you would have made in the president's shoes?
 - d. The CC president's public statements indicate that he did not know it was against the rules. {He said he didn't know that was the rule but he did what he thought was right. When you leave campus with a student, you bring them back.} Does it matter if he knew it was against the rules? Why or why not? Should it matter? Why or why not?

- e. Do you think he should/would have done the same thing even if he had known?
 - f. Now imagine a scenario in which there is an environmental club trip where there was a protest and a student was arrested and then bailed out and brought home, and there are no broader, institutional consequences to be handed down by any governing body. Would that change your actions/opinions related to this issue?
10. Student affairs scenario – Advisor and Veteran student
- a. What should the advisor do now?
 - b. Would you have done what he did in the first place?
 - c. What would you do now?
11. Is there anything about your institution and/or department that you feel positively or negatively impacts your decision-making? Anything about Division II that positively or negatively impacts your DM?
12. Do your professional connections (outside the institution) and their guidelines/codes of conduct, etc. impact your decision-making?
13. Is there anything I'm missing? Anything we didn't touch on regarding ethics and decision-making that you think is important? Anything you'd put in the pre-printed circles?

APPENDIX B: Texts of the two case studies

Case #1

A few years ago there was a basketball game between two community colleges. At the end of the game there was a brawl. As a result of the brawl, one of the visiting players was arrested for assaulting a fan who had come down on the floor into the brawl. The visiting team's president had actually made the trip to watch the game. He went and bailed the student out of jail and brought him back to campus.

Would you have done the same thing in the president's shoes? And why or why not?

Additional details about situation were shared as the conversation went on including:

- a. the fact that it is against NJCAA for anyone associated with the college to bail a student-athlete out of jail
- b. the fact that the consequence for violating this rule was that the visiting team, ranked third in the country at the time was banned from post-season play
- c. the president's quote to newspapers about not knowing it was against the rules but doing what he thought was right
- d. the race of the individuals involved

Case #2 – Somewhat modified version of “Going to Bat for Your Students” (Rumann, 2009, p. 43-44)

In this case, we have Frank who is a career and transfer advisor at Windy Meadows Community College which is a two-year school of 2,000 students in a small rural town of 7,000

people. Frank's job is to assist students with transferring to four-year schools and assist them with their career choices during the semester. He works with a student named Sam trying to find Sam an appropriate school to transfer to and helping Sam explore his career options in the field of education. Sam is a 28-year-old student who began attending Windy Meadows over three years ago and had hoped to graduate by now. However, after successfully completing his first semester at the school with a 3.5 GPA, his National Guard unit was deployed to a combat zone for an 18-month tour of duty. He returned to school and completed another year, but he's now struggling.

Sam and Frank have gotten to know each other outside of school because it's a small town. They play in the same community softball team. They have become friends, and Sam has confided in Frank that his adjustment back to civilian life has been difficult. He experiences nightmares. He feels anxious, and his grades are really suffering. He's concerned that he's not going to be able to graduate because the school has a policy that if students earn below a 2.0 for two consecutive semesters they must sit out a semester before reenrolling.

Sam has just gotten notice that the college has suspended him for a semester because of his grades, and he goes to see Frank and asks Frank to speak up on his behalf. Sam tells Frank "I'm afraid if I set out I won't come back to school. Can you help me out?" Frank says "why are you asking me?" Sam says "because you're the only one here who knows what I've been going through. I shared my experiences with you. Can you help me out?" Frank says "I will recommend that you are placed on probation rather than suspension on one condition—you go see a college counselor or community counselor to get some help for the nightmares and the anxiety." Sam says "OK."

As a part of the suspension appeal process, staff members are allowed to write letters on the student's behalf. So Frank writes a letter on Sam's behalf suggesting that he be placed on probation instead of suspension. The appeals committee grants that so Sam gets to stay in school the following semester.

Halfway through the semester, the grades come out and Sam is not making satisfactory progress, and he is not going to see the counselor. Frank has messages from the dean of students and the dean of instruction to come see them in regards to Sam. Frank is unsure what to do, what he'll say about Sam, and how to handle the situation.

So the question is—if you are Frank what do you do in this situation?

Additional details about situation were shared as the conversation went on including:

- a. how Frank knew that Sam was not seeing the counselor (because of their personal connection, not professional)
- b. Frank had very recently been approached by other student-veterans from Sam's National Guard unit. Those students were also asking Frank to go to bat for them regarding their academic struggles.

APPENDIX C: Hands-on tool

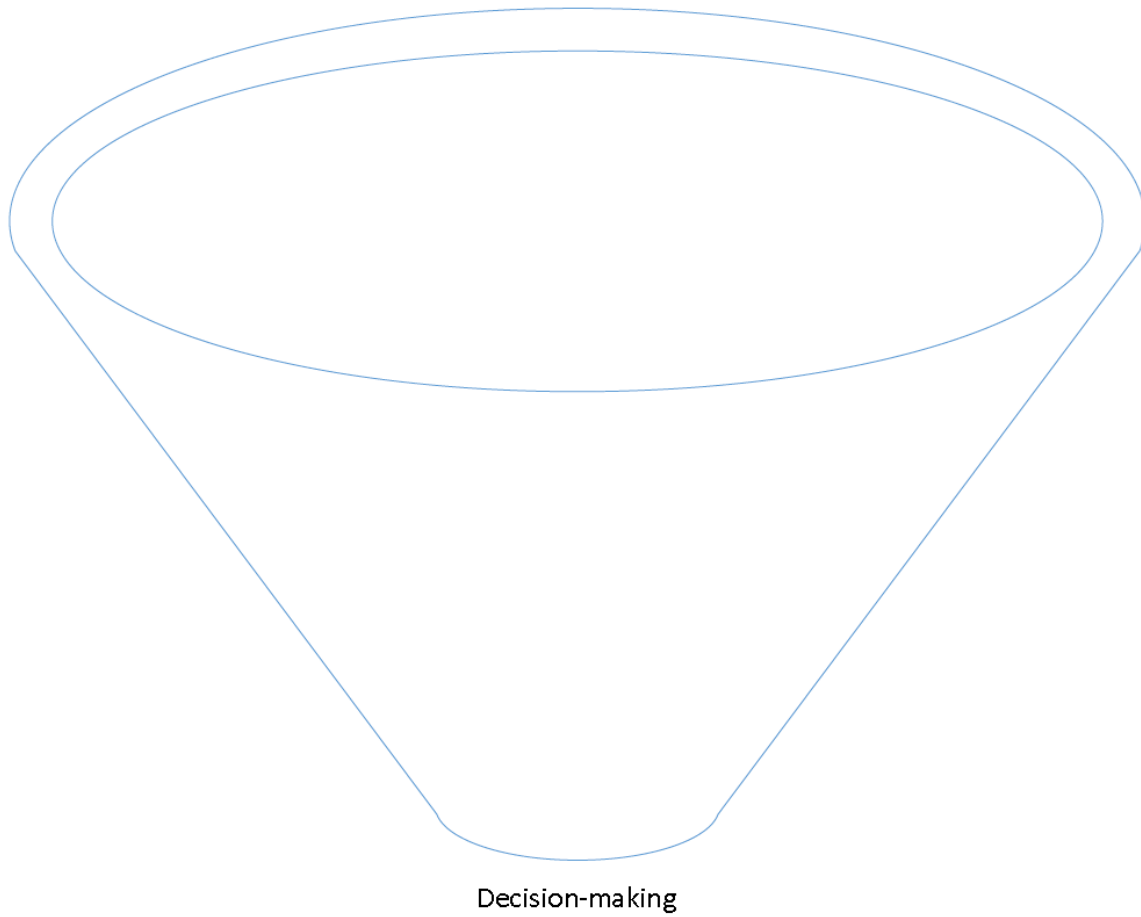


Figure C1a. Funnel piece of hands-on tool

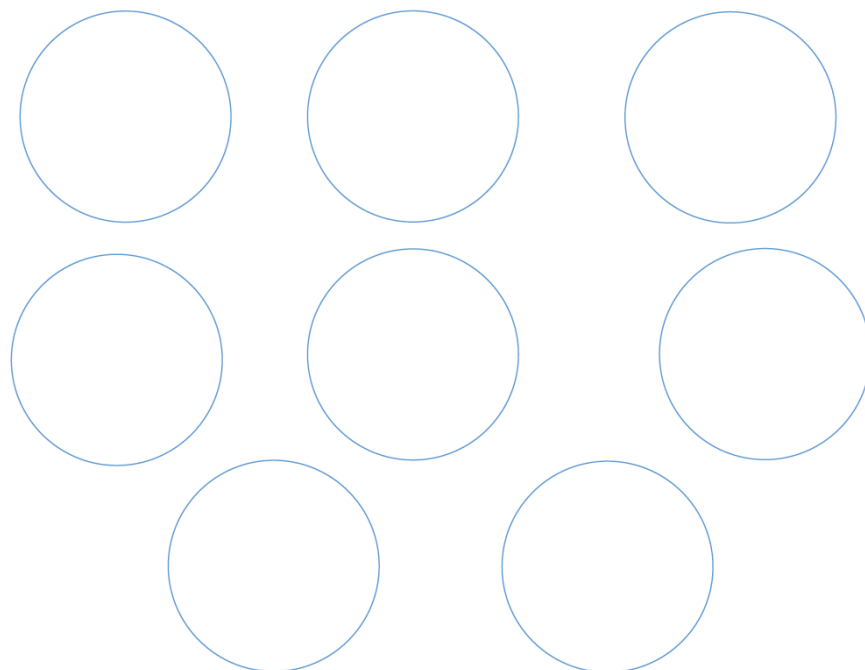


Figure C1b. Blank and preprinted circle pieces of hands-on activity

APPENDIX D: *Funnel decision* photos.

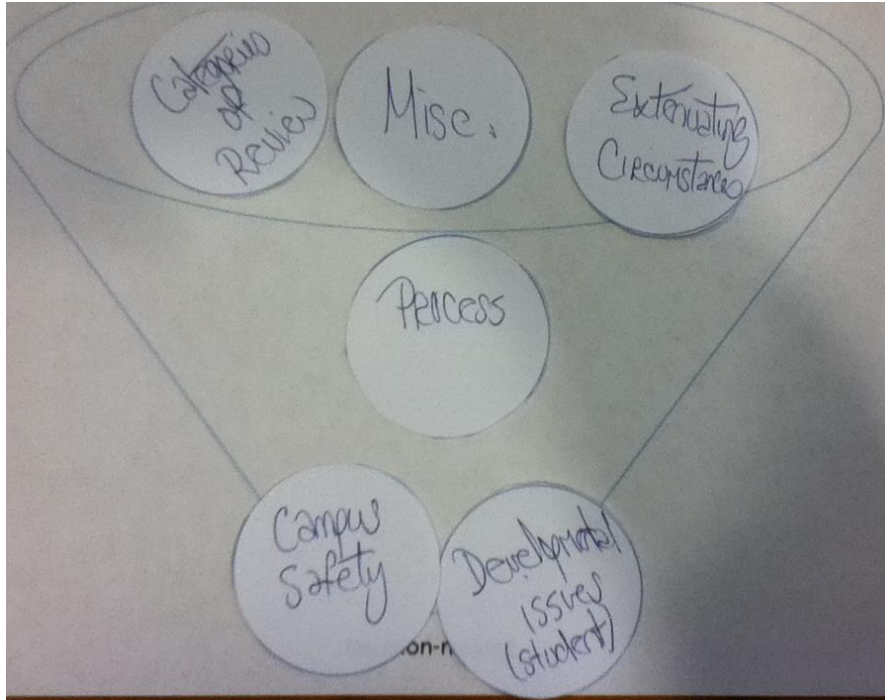


Figure D1a. Anna picture 1 (Factors that influenced her decision to dismiss a student after a conduct appeal)

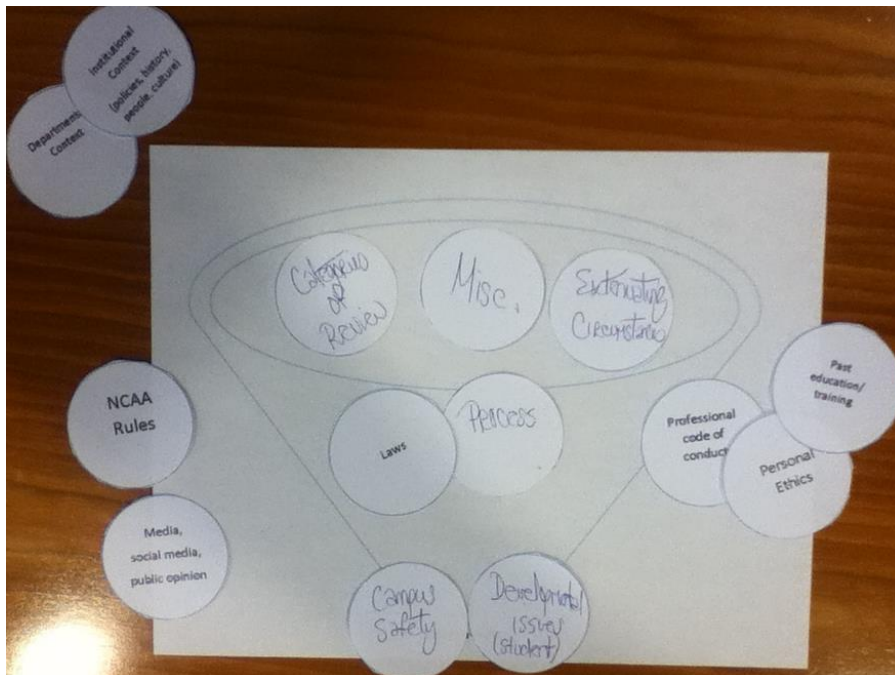


Figure D1b. Anna picture 2

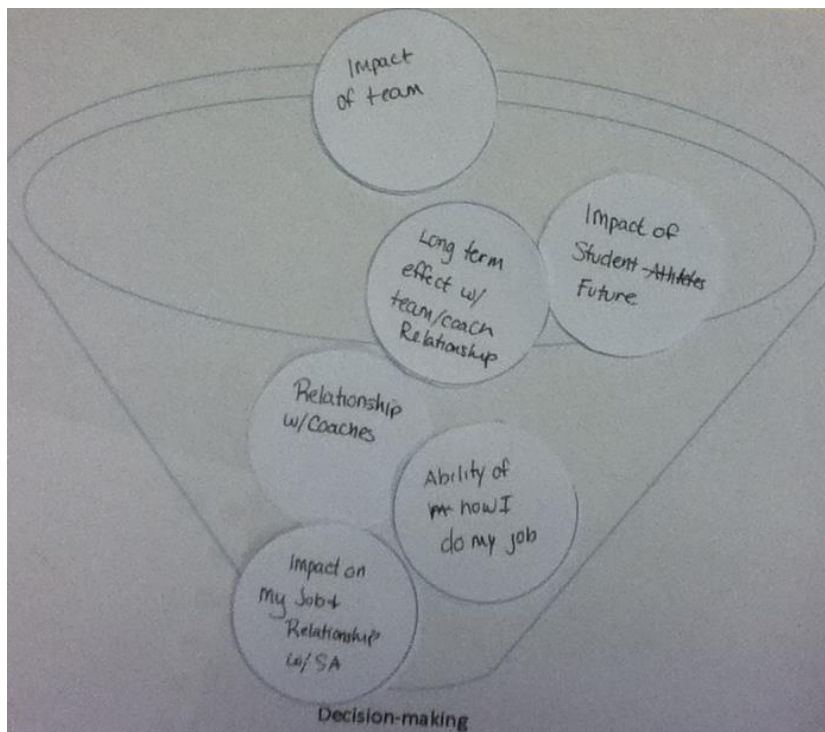


Figure D2a. Beth picture 1 (Factors that influenced her decision to report her institution for an NCAA rules violation)



Figure D2b. Beth picture 2

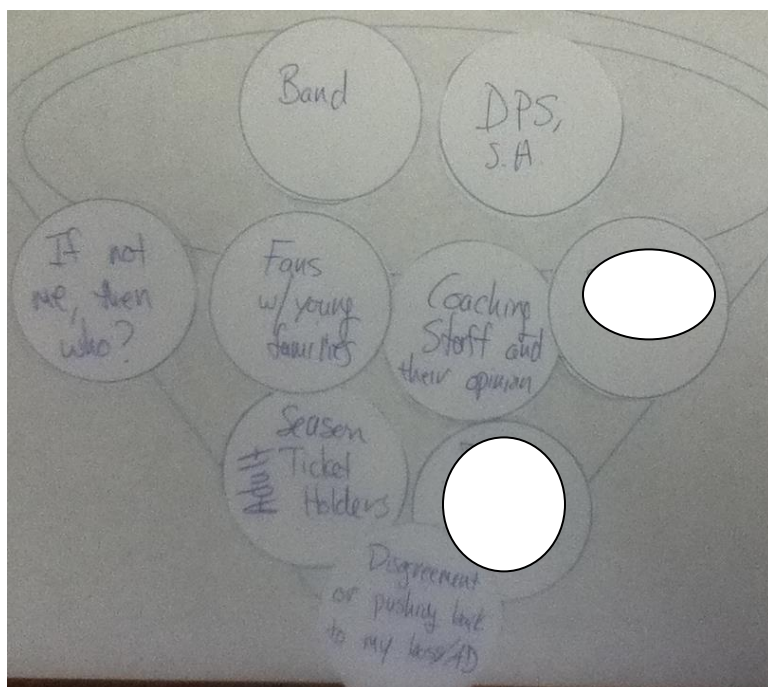


Figure D3a. Chad picture 1 (Factors that influenced figuring out how to deal with bad fan behavior at hockey games when he did not think he should be the one to do so)

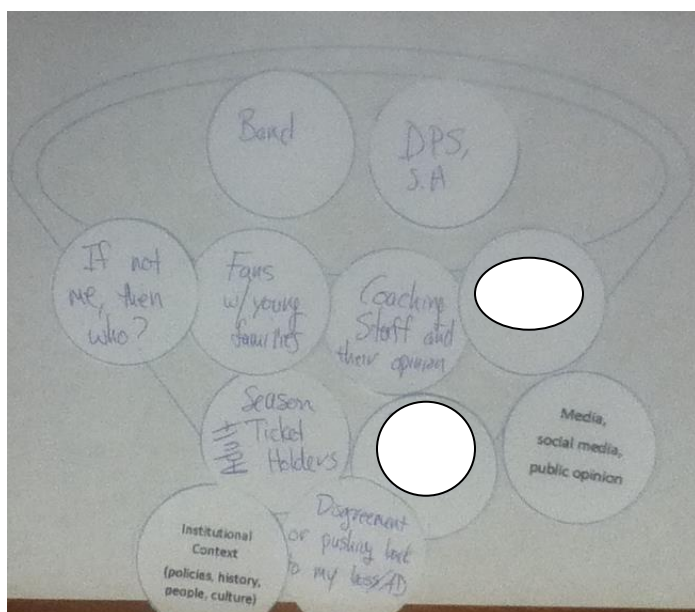


Figure D3b. Chad picture 2

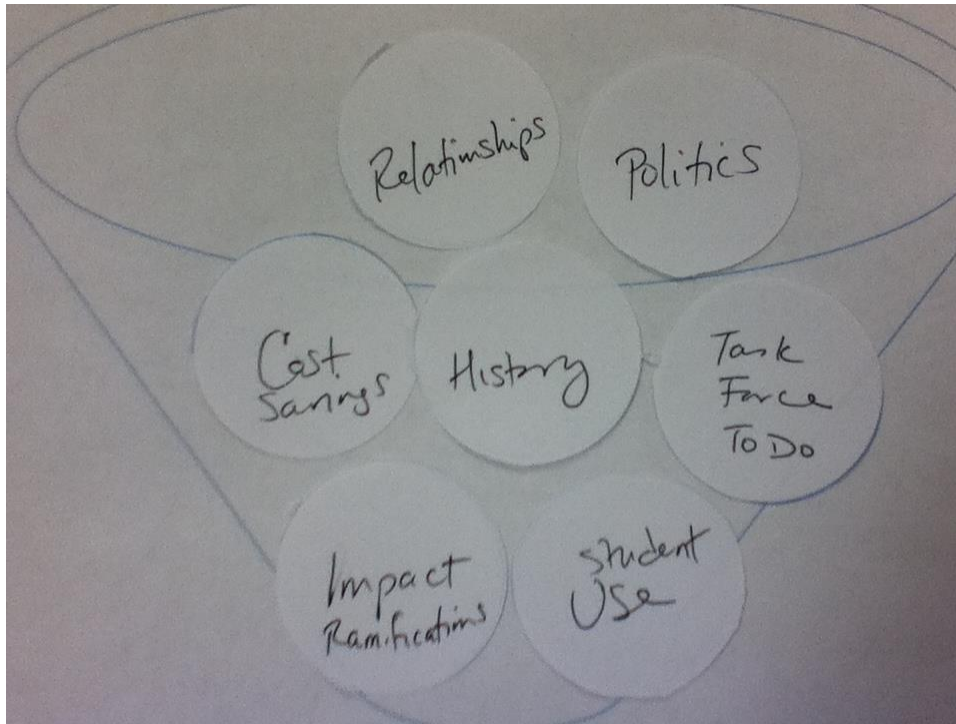


Figure D4a. Diane picture 1 (Factors that influenced the decision to eliminate a night of the campus shuttle service)

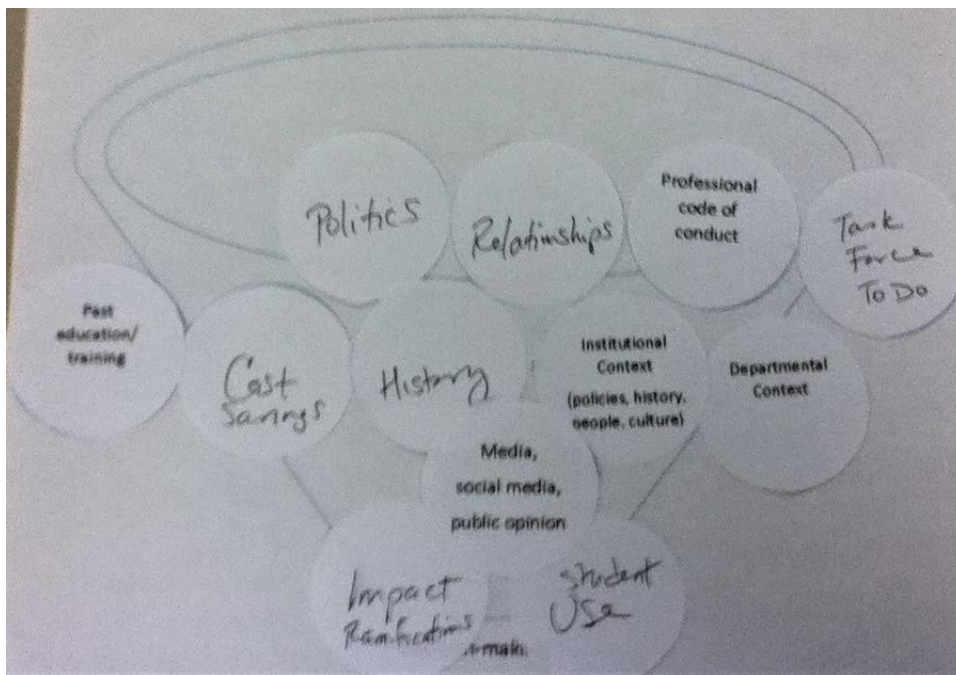


Figure D4b. Diane picture 2

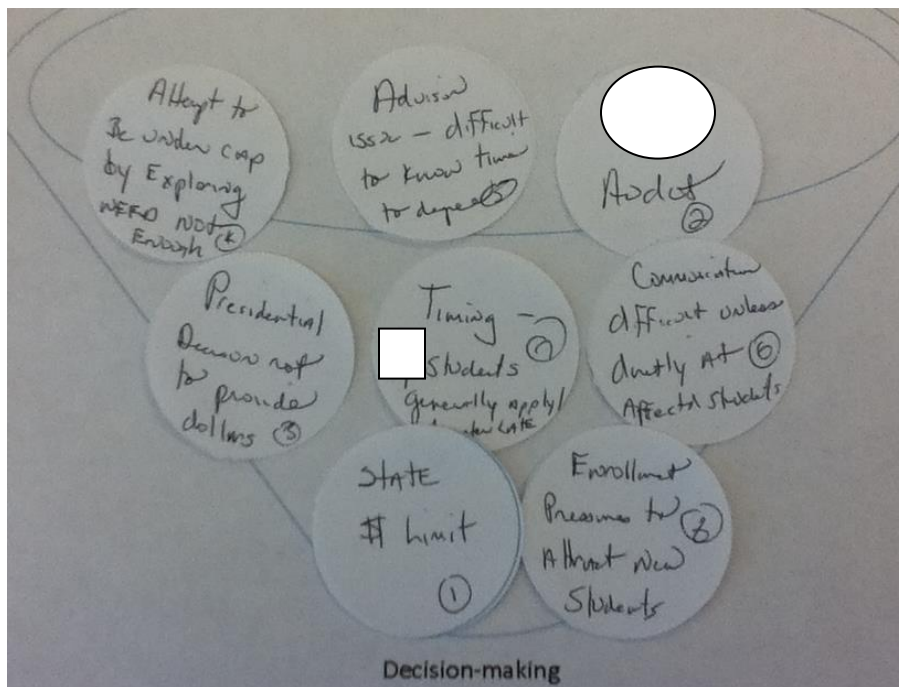


Figure D5a. Eileen picture 1 (Factors that influenced decision of how to deal with an almost \$2 million dollar budget shortfall after the state capped a specific aid program)

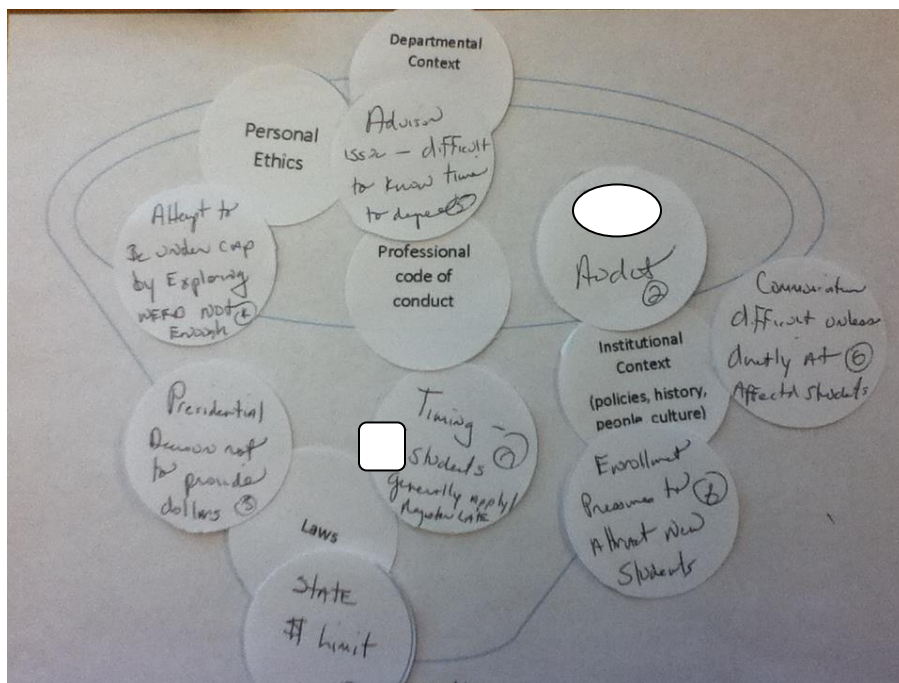


Figure D5b. Eileen picture 2

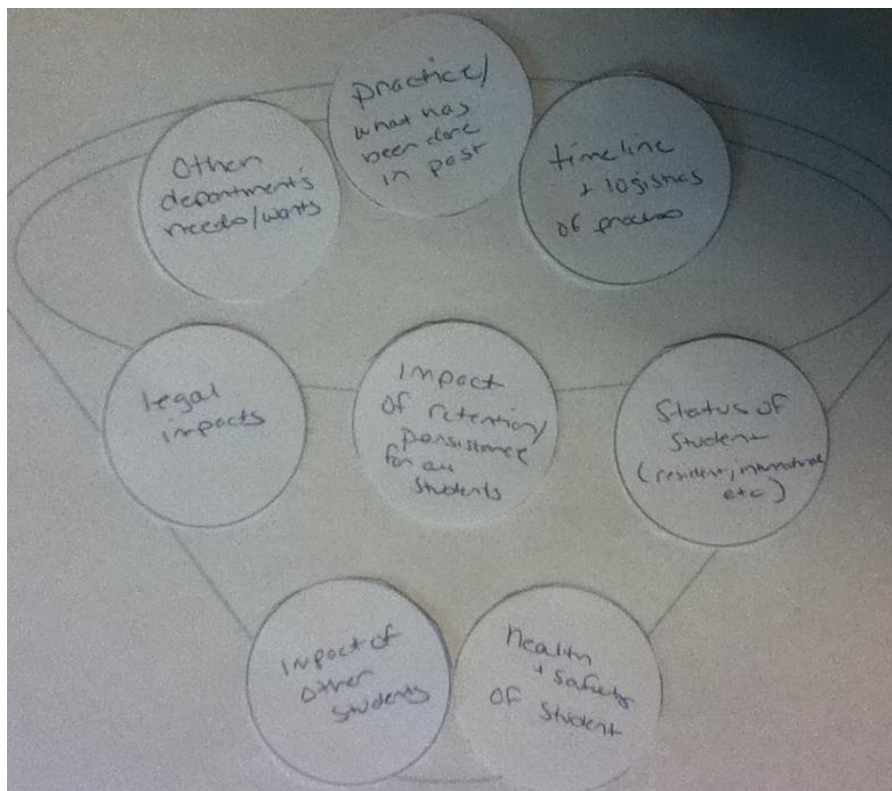


Figure D6a. Gina picture 1 (Factors that influenced decision to remove a student from campus due to behavioral issues)



Figure D6b. Gina picture 2

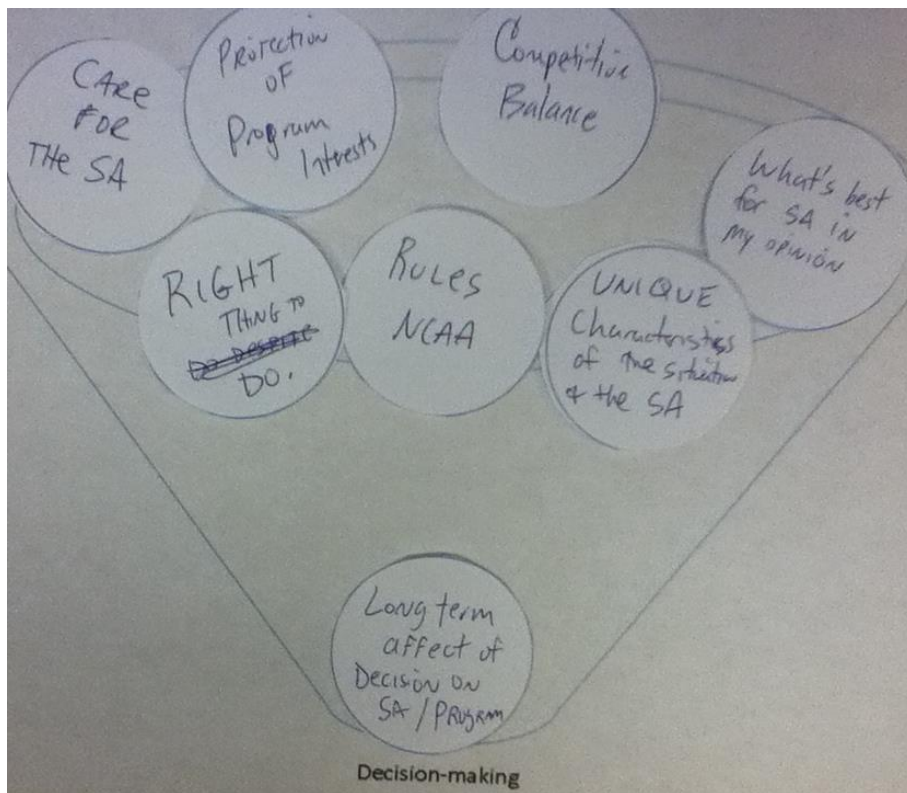


Figure D7a. Helen picture 1 (Factors that influenced her decision to sign a waiver for transferring student-athlete)

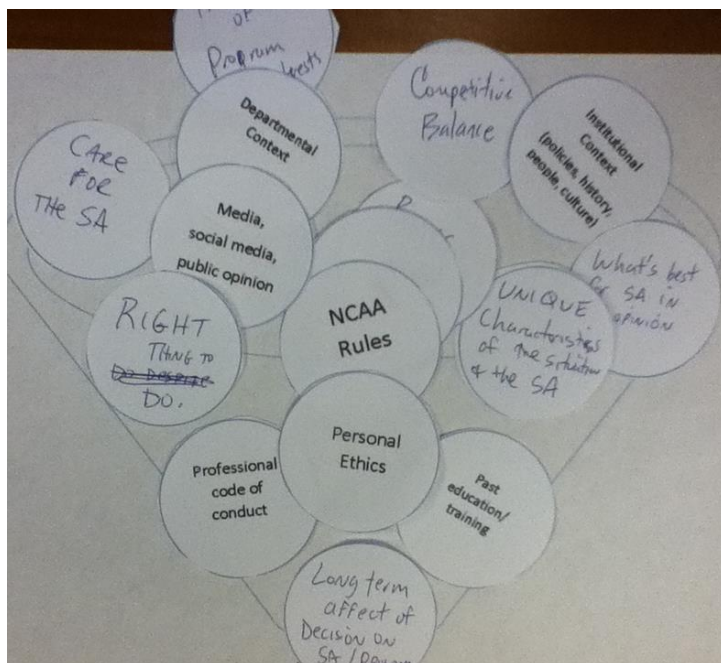


Figure D7b. Helen picture 2

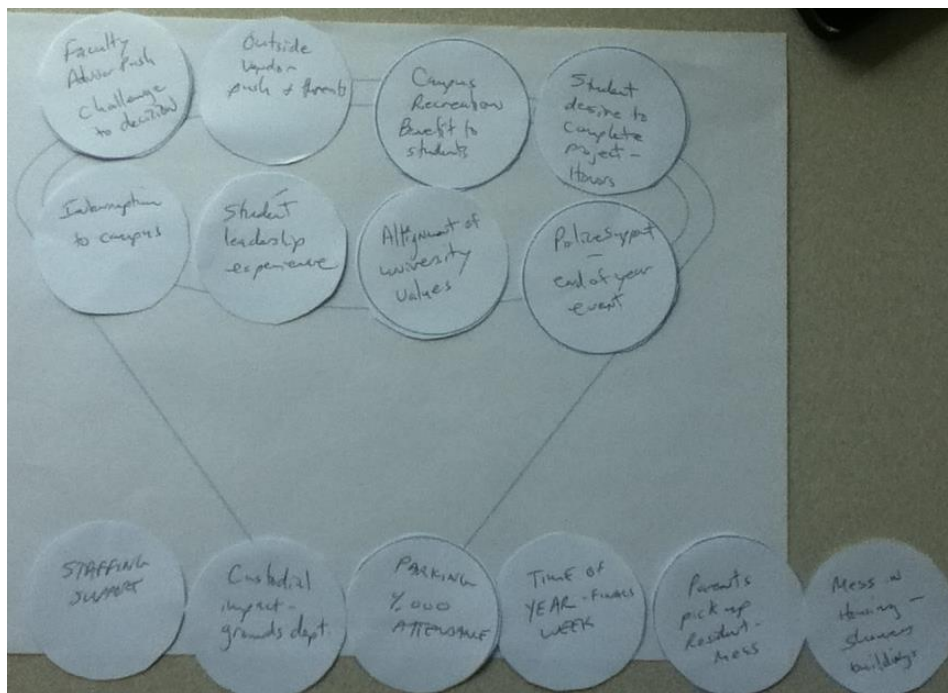


Figure D8a. Irv picture 1 (Factors that influenced his decision to not allow an on-campus color run as an Honors project)

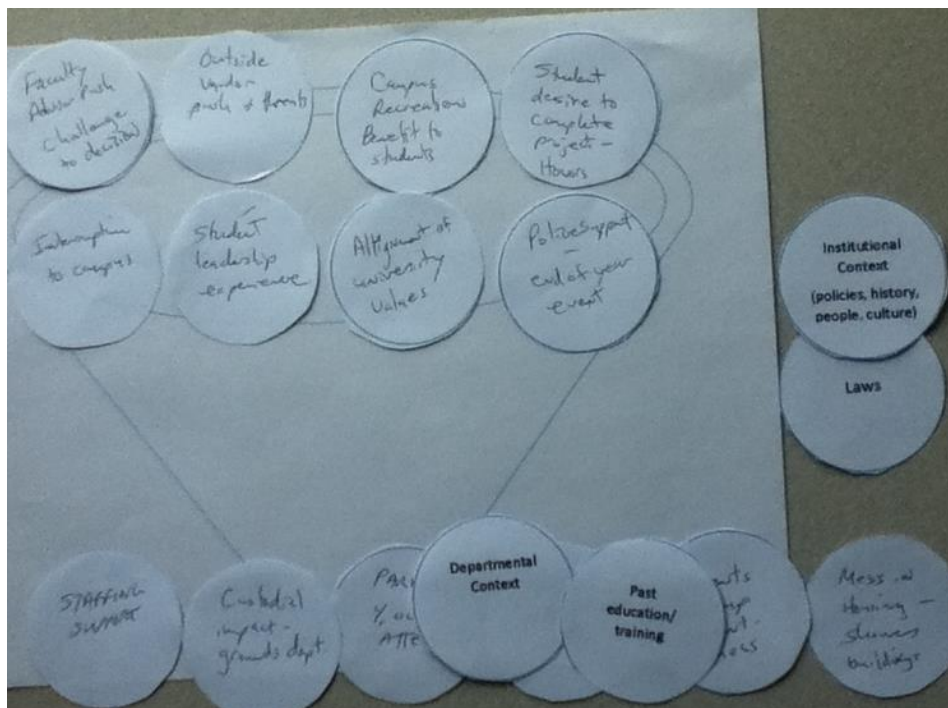


Figure D8b. Irv picture 2

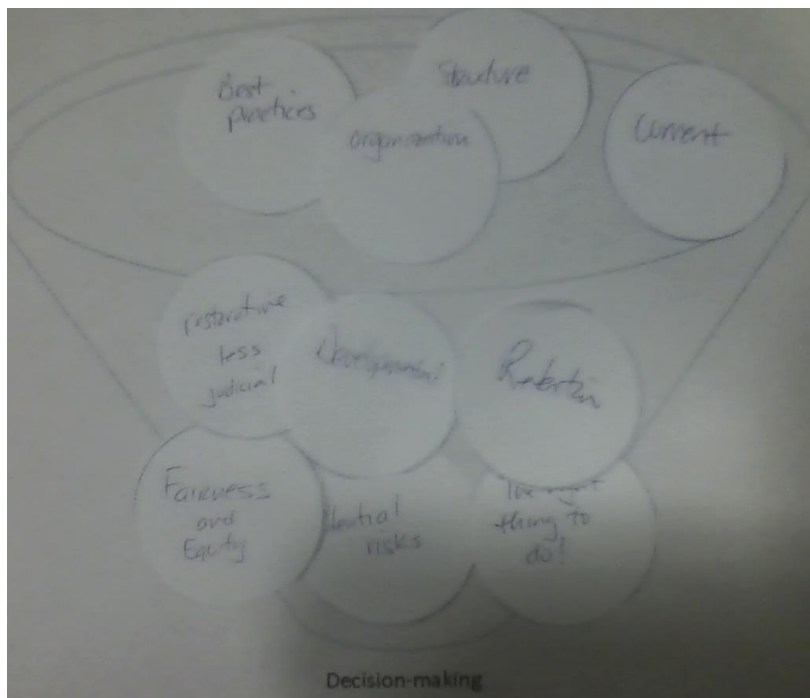


Figure D9a. Randall picture 1 (Factors that influenced his decision to codifying conduct/ discipline policies and procedures)

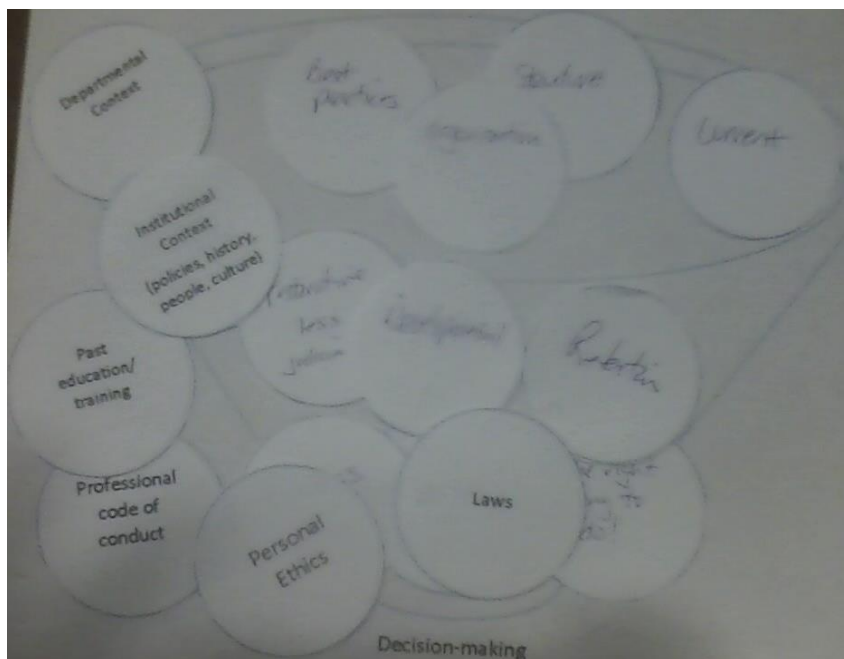


Figure D9b. Randall picture 2

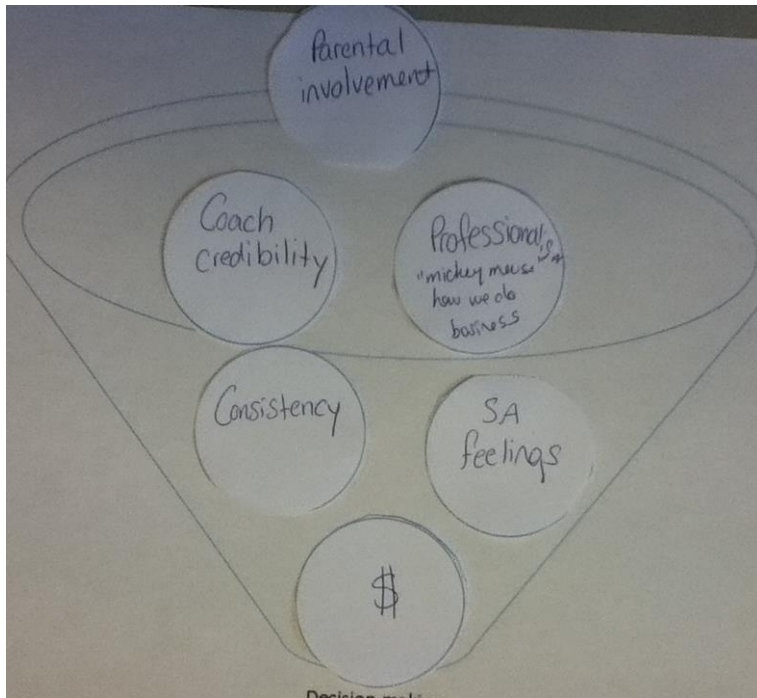


Figure D10a. Sharon picture 1 (Factors that influenced her decision to change departmental policy regarding the limit on the numbers of players from a team allowed to compete in post-season competitions)



Figure D10b. Sharon picture 2

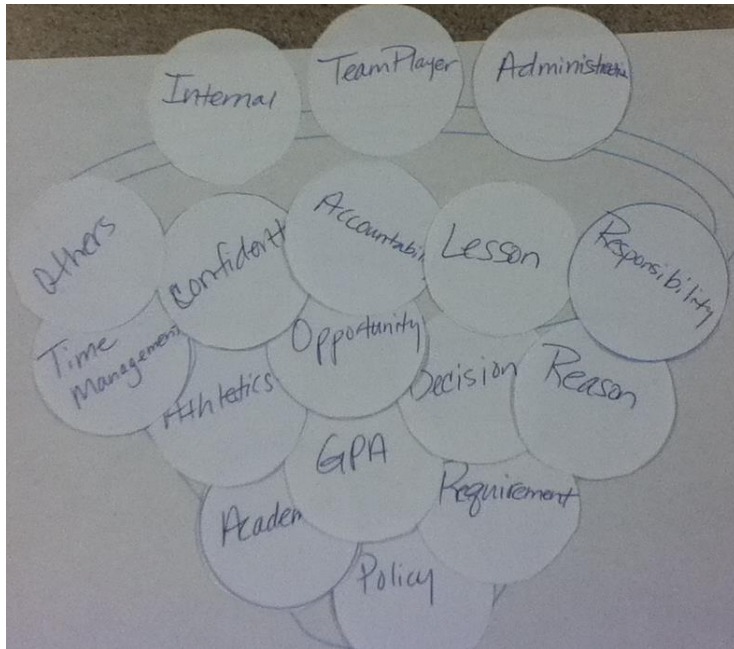


Figure D11a. Tara picture 1 (Factors that influenced her decision to not allow a specific student-athlete an exception to the department study hall requirement)

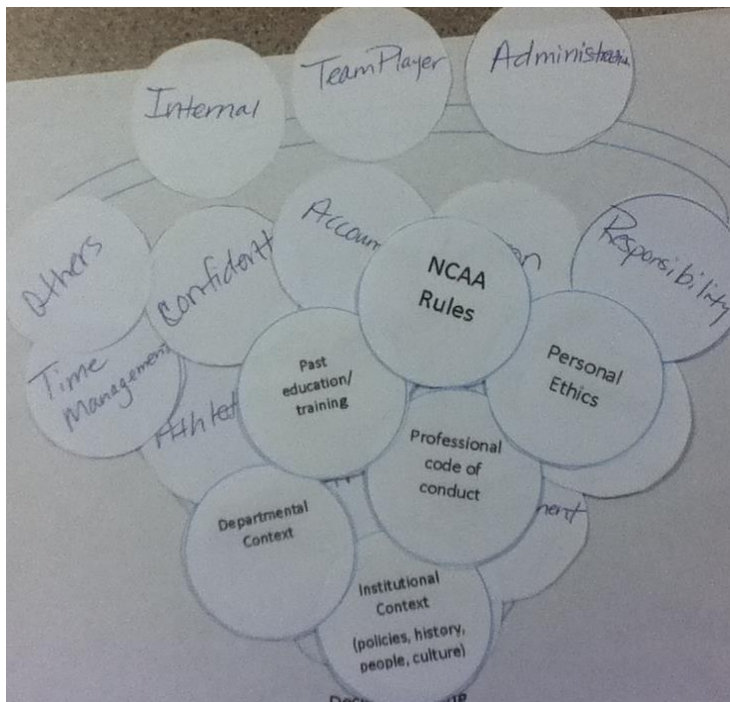


Figure D11b. Tara picture 2

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