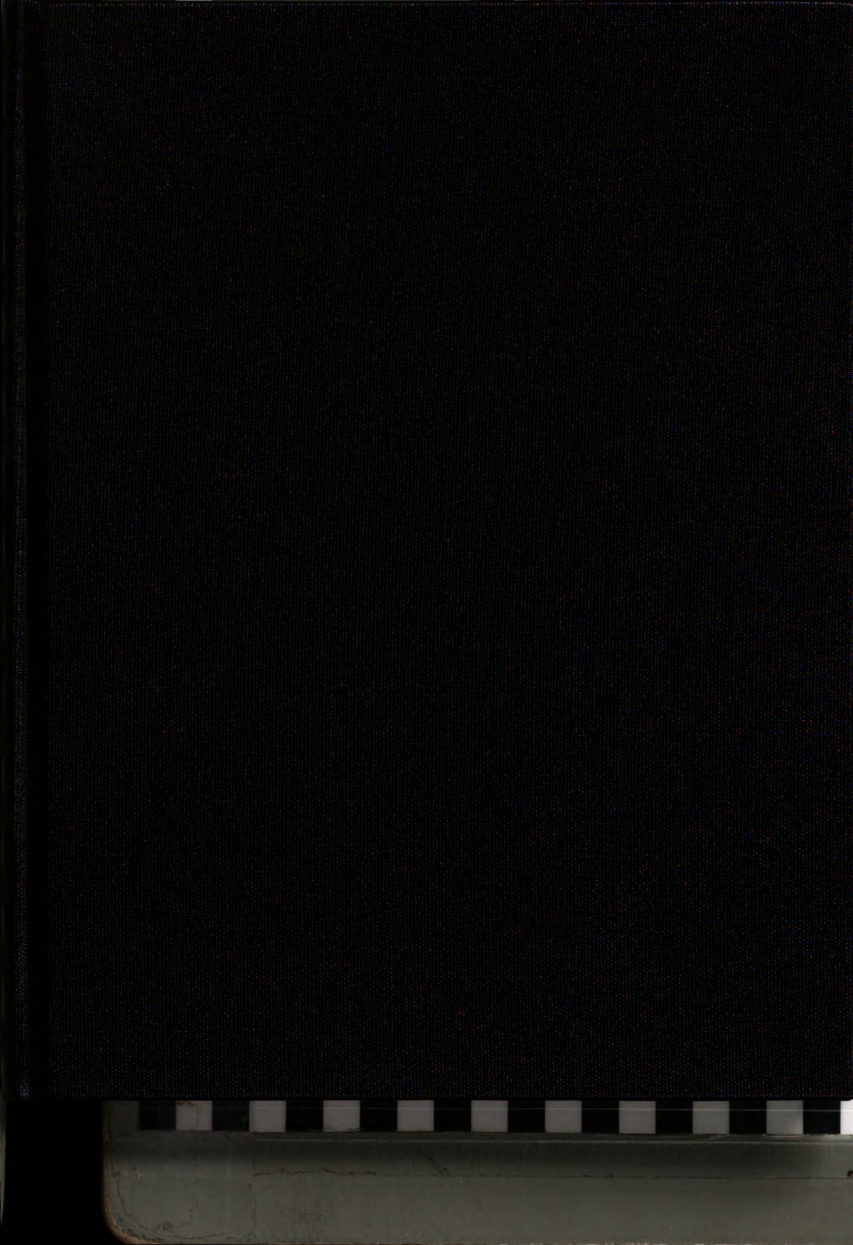




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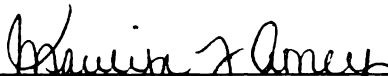
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SUPERVISION IN STUDENT AFFAIRS:
SYNERGISTIC SUPERVISION, PERSISTENCE IN
AND COMMITMENT TO THE
STUDENT AFFAIRS PROFESSION

By

Virginia E. Randall

A DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

SUPERVISION IN STUDENT AFFAIRS: SYNERGISTIC SUPERVISION, PERSISTENCE IN AND COMMITMENT TO THE STUDENT AFFAIRS PROFESSION

By

Virginia E. Randall

This study explored areas of synergistic supervision, persistence in and commitment to the student affairs profession. Persistence was defined by an employee's intention to continue a career in student affairs, regardless of the institution in which they were employed. Commitment to the profession was defined by employee membership in professional organizations, conference attendance, conference participation such as presentations, and involvement in research and publication.

A two-part study was conducted using both quantitative and qualitative data gathering methods. Two hundred thirty-seven student affairs professionals working at public Michigan universities responded to an on-line survey. Regardless of their position title, gender, race/ethnicity, age, the length of time they had worked in the profession or professional organization membership, survey respondents reported that the actions of their supervisors were consistent with components of Winston and Creamer's (1997) synergistic supervision.

Interviews were conducted with nine student affairs professionals working in the functional areas of student life, career services or housing at public Michigan universities. Four discernable themes and patterns emerged related to

the interview participants' experiences as student affairs professionals and as supervisors: (a) mentoring, (b) balance, (c) focus on students, and (d) creating opportunities. Even though interview participants may not have been aware of the term, they participated in many of the elements of synergistic supervision. Interview participants perceived that the synergistic supervision they received gave them the opportunity to develop both personally and professionally and contributed to their persistence in the student affairs profession.

A different definition of commitment to the student affairs profession emerged through the interviews in the qualitative portion of this study. The new definition of commitment was based in a commitment to students and in making a difference in the lives of students and staff and was supported by synergistic supervision. Commitment to the profession was complimented by mentoring, finding balance between personal and professional goals and lives, and by creating opportunities for others to grow. The components of synergistic supervision received allowed both survey respondents and interview participants to demonstrate their commitment to the profession.

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Chapter I

Introduction

Both faculty and student affairs professionals share core ideas about higher education, including a dedication to serving the interests of individuals and society (Winston & Creamer, 1997; Young, 1996). Individuals who become involved in the student affairs profession are committed to the education and nurturance of the whole student (Creamer & Winston, 1999) and find opportunities to create positive environments for student learning. They also develop programs to address evolving and increasing student needs while facing endless challenges, rewards, controversy, and critics (Ellis, 2002). The challenges confronting student affairs professionals, including limited resources and greater accountability (Grace-Odeleye, 1998; Lovell & Kosten, 2000; Woodard, 1998), have led to concerns about staff retention (Blackhurst, 2000; Evans, 1988; Johnsrud & Rosser, 1997; Rosser & Javinar, 2003; Scott, 2000; Taylor & von Destinon, 2000; Ward, 1995; Woodard & Komives, 1990) and commitment and contribution to the field (DeCoster & Brown, 1991; Kruger, 2000; Nuss, 2000; Winston & Creamer, 1997).

New professionals entering the student affairs field come from a wide variety of backgrounds and experiences; some with experience in higher education, some with experience in other fields, and others with no professional experience (Janosik & Creamer, 2003). They typically find themselves in positions that are at the low end of the pay scale; require a total professional life commitment, often at the expense of a personal life, lack professional

development and mentoring opportunities, and require at least regional mobility for career advancement (Woodard & Komives, 1990). The relationship that new professionals have with their first supervisor may be critical in the development of their commitment to a career in student affairs work (Harned & Murphy, 1998). Janosik and Creamer (2003) believe "...supervision of new professionals may be among the most critical supervision tasks or responsibilities of a college or university" (p. 1). It is especially important that a new employee receive feedback from a supervisor during the first few months on the job along with assistance in becoming socialized to the organization's culture and politics (Amey, 2002). Careful supervision of new professionals can help them begin career-long development (Carpenter & Miller, 1981). Absence of a supervisor concerned about the employee's personal and professional growth can contribute to the employee's decision to leave the organization, and even the profession, after a short period of time. Quality supervision may influence an employee's decision to remain at the employing institution.

More experienced professionals with years of service may find limited opportunities for advancement and may also leave the profession. The organization of educational institutions resembles a pyramid, with many more jobs at the bottom of the pyramid than at the top (Benke & Disque, 1990; Carpenter, Guido-DiBrito & Kelly, 1987; Mills, 2000). A perceived lack of opportunity for promotion within the institution contributed to the intention of mid-level student affairs administrators to leave more than administrators in academic, business, and external affairs (Johnsrud & Rosser, 1997). Providing

means for experienced professionals to contribute to the profession through membership in professional associations, conference attendance and presentations, through research and publication (Komives, 1992), opportunities for continued graduate studies, or by increasing responsibilities in their position will help them continue their commitment to the profession. The skills gained through professional organization activities are skills that can be brought back to the employing institution, benefiting both the institution and the individual. Supervisors of more experienced professionals can play an important role in the continued development of student affairs professionals and their commitment and contribution to the field. Carpenter (2001) believes the collaborative process of supervision continues throughout a career: "All staff members, no matter the length of their tenure in the field or expertise, deserve regular, thoughtful supervision" (Winston & Creamer, 1997, p. 212).

Good supervision not only leads to greater employee satisfaction, which might result in less turnover; it can lead to greater productivity as well (Cooper, Saunders, Howell & Bates, 2001; Schuh & Carlisle, 1991). Good supervision also "...improves the quality of the work, enhances the work environment and develops more supportive relationships among colleagues" (Palombi, 2002, p. 39). "Effective supervision can greatly stimulate the professional and personal growth required to develop and maintain quality staff" (Baier, 1985, p. 216). Young (1990) believes the relationship that mid-managers have with their supervisor may be the most critical of any relationships in student affairs.

Winston and Creamer (1997) defined supervision in higher education as “a management function intended to promote the achievement of institutional goals and to enhance the personal and professional capabilities and performance of staff” (p. 186). They proposed a theoretical model of effective supervision, called synergistic supervision, which should be viewed essentially as a helping process provided by the institution to benefit or support staff rather than as a mechanism for punishment for unsatisfactory performance. Characteristics of synergistic supervision include: dual focus; joint effort; two-way communication; focus on competence (knowledge, work-related skills, personal and professional skills, and attitudes); goals; a systematic and ongoing process; and growth orientation (Winston & Creamer, 1997). This definition acknowledges that meeting the goals of both the individual and the institution is a crucial component of supervision.

There are concerns in student affairs about retention of employees and their persistence in the profession. The terms retention and persistence will be used interchangeably throughout this study. There are also concerns about commitment to the student affairs profession as demonstrated by participation in professional associations and conferences and through contributions of research and publication. The practice of synergistic supervision, with its dual focus on benefits for both the institution and the individual, can improve retention and increase demonstrated commitment to the profession.

Research Questions

After a review of current student affairs literature on supervision, retention, and commitment to the profession, the following research questions were designed to meet the purpose of the study and direct the study and methods of data analysis.

1. Is synergistic supervision practiced in the student affairs profession at public universities in Michigan?
2. Do individuals' perceptions of synergistic supervision received and its focus on meeting the goals of the institution and the personal and professional goals of the employee influence persistence in the student affairs profession?
3. Do individuals' perceptions of synergistic supervision received influence commitment to the student affairs profession?

In order to answer these research questions, a two-part study was conducted using both quantitative and qualitative data gathering methods to determine if the use of behaviors and characteristics of synergistic supervision influence the persistence of staff in the profession and their commitment to the profession.

After an introduction to the purpose and significance of this study in Chapter I, a literature review of supervision, persistence in the student affairs profession and commitment to the student affairs profession is found in Chapter II. Chapter III provides a description of the methodologies used for this study. Data analyses of results of this study are presented in Chapter IV followed by a

discussion of results, major findings, implications and recommendations in
Chapter V.

Chapter II

Review of the Literature

In order to understand the issues surrounding the problem of supervision, a review of the literature regarding the current state of supervision in student affairs is warranted. Areas to be explored include: the definition of supervision; supervision as a component of staffing practices, personnel management, and staff development; supervision from different perspectives; persistence in student affairs; and commitment to the profession of student affairs.

Supervision

Student affairs professionals are hired, in part, for positions based on a number of specific skills they possess. Rarely is the skill of supervision a strong consideration in hiring decisions, yet it is often a major responsibility of the student affairs practitioner. "Few practitioners have received adequate preparation as supervisors...and frequently pay little attention to those roles after entering the field" (Schuh & Carlisle, 1991, p. 495). A meta-analysis of 30 years of research relating to successful student affairs administration (Lovell & Kosten, 2000) suggests that administration, management, and human facilitation (including staff supervision) skills are critical to success. Chief student affairs officers ranked staff supervision as the area of expertise or knowledge most important in the performance of their duties (Lunsford, 1984) and personnel management skills as essential for success at the midlevel (Saunders & Cooper, 1999). Past presidents of the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) and the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA)

identified supervision as one of the most critical skills necessary for Chief Student Affairs Officers (CSAOs) (Cooper, Miller, Saunders, Chernow, & Kulic, 1999). Winston and Creamer (1997) argue "...that the most important function of any administrative-level professional is to select, assign, supervise, and develop the people who staff the division's units" (p. 6). Harned and Murphy (1998) believe "there may be few organizations as deprived of traditional managerial and supervisory training and development protocols as colleges and universities" (p. 45). The quality of education is connected to the quality of institutional staffing practices, especially with regards to supervision (Winston & Creamer, 1997).

The importance of supervision is recognized in standards established for training new student affairs professionals. The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) includes supervised practice as one of the required elements in the curriculum of masters-level graduate programs for student affairs professionals (CAS Standards, 2003). According to CAS Standards, supervision must be provided by competent student affairs professionals possessing appropriate student affairs education and experience.

Even though they may have experienced effective supervision from a competent student affairs professional as a graduate or undergraduate student, many practitioners entering the field have had little experience or preparation as supervisors (Schuh & Carlisle, 1991; Stock-Ward & Javorek, 2003; Woodard & Komives, 1990). Staff members may enter the profession directly from graduate preparation programs, from other fields, or with years of professional experience.

They join the organization and may have immediate responsibility for the supervision of staff including new professionals and graduate assistants.

Although most student affairs practitioners spend a substantial part of each day managing staff (Dalton, 1996), few student affairs divisions include supervision training as part of professional or staff development. In a survey conducted by Winston, Torres, Carpenter, McIntire and Peterson (2001) of 263 Senior Student Affairs Officers, 43% reported that they provided no training in supervision to their staff. Thirty-eight percent reported training was offered occasionally, 14% provided annual training, and 6% provided training at the time a person assumed supervisory responsibilities.

Additionally, student affairs staffs often indicate that they do not receive adequate supervision (Arminio & Creamer, 2001; Saunders, Cooper, Winston & Chernow, 2000; Winston & Creamer, 1997). For many student affairs professionals, the context for a definition of supervision can mean “being called on the carpet” for poor performance (Winston & Creamer, 1998), or making a mistake and being “caught” by a supervisor and “punished” or corrected (Carpenter, 2001). Supervision should be viewed essentially as a helping process provided by the institution to benefit or support staff rather than, as is often reflected in the literature, a mechanism for punishment inflicted on practitioners for unsatisfactory performance.

Given that much of the supervision literature focuses on discipline and control as a way to improve performance, there is a perception that professionals who are performing well in their jobs do not need supervision (Winston &

Cremer, 1998). Supervision can be perceived as an insult to the practitioner who is doing a good job and is often seen as important only when dealing with employees who have problems or are new to the organization (Winston & Cremer, 1997). Carpenter (2001) presents a different view when he says that supervision is a collaborative process that continues throughout a career. Winston and Cremer (1997) add: "All staff members, no matter the length of their tenure in the field or expertise, deserve regular, thoughtful supervision" (p. 212). The supervision provided to staff in entry-level positions, seasoned professionals, employees suffering performance problems, or those who are performing well in their positions will not be identical. It should reflect the collaboration between supervisors and supervisees in meeting the organization's goals while helping the supervisee meet personal and professional goals (Winston & Cremer, 1997).

Although supervision is acknowledged to be important in the administration of student affairs, a review of the literature shows there has been little research on the topic (Stock-Ward & Javorek, 2003). Cooper et al. (2001) note that much of the literature on supervision is descriptive of general trends about supervisory practices or is limited to satisfaction surveys. They believe that such research is a good first step in identifying effective supervision strategies, but further research should use more rigorous research methodologies that measure changes resulting from training sessions or supervision practices.

Supervision has usually been examined as one of several interrelated functions of staffing practices or as one component of staff development

(Carpenter, 2001; Carpenter, Torres & Winston, 2001; Dalton, 1996; Winston & Creamer, 1997, 1998). Some researchers have examined specific aspects of supervision from business or the human resource management perspective (Dalton, 1996; Holmes, 1998; Miller & Winston, 1991; Taylor & von Destinon, 2000). Others have examined supervision at different levels in the administrative structure (Ellis & Moon, 1991; Fey & Carpenter, 1996; Mills, 2000; Schneider, 2002; Waite, 1993.) Still other researchers provided definitions of supervision, and some attempted to describe quality supervision (Arminio & Creamer, 2001; Mills, 2000; Rowley & Sherman, 2004; Schuh & Carlisle, 1991; Winston & Creamer, 1997).

In an extensive review of the student affairs literature on supervision, Cooper et al. (2001) found one hundred forty-five articles published in either the *NASPA Journal* or the *Journal of College Student Development* during the period of 1969-1999. They separated these articles into three categories: general supervision and personnel management; staff development; and supervising paraprofessional staff. Eighty-three percent of the articles during this thirty-year period focused on either staff development or supervising paraprofessional staff. They found twenty-five articles related to general supervision and personnel management. Fifteen of these did not focus on outcomes and were not included in their analysis. The ten remaining articles assessed the outcomes of supervision or management practices and could be classified by topic, functional area, types of staff, treatment, and instrument or measurement utilized. Cooper et al. note that associations between perceptions of positive supervision and

productivity, longevity in the profession, and general organization effectiveness have not been empirically demonstrated. They recommend rigorous research that obtains outcome measures other than perceptions or satisfaction; includes empirical methodology using comparison groups; and uses validated instruments within the quantitative studies.

Supervision defined.

A number of authors have provided definitions of supervision. Mills (2000) viewed supervision as accomplishing goals by working through others. Schuh and Carlisle (1991) defined supervision in a broad sense "...to include any relationship where one person has the responsibility to provide leadership, direction, information, motivation, evaluation, or support for one or more persons" (p. 497). Rowley and Sherman (2004) noted that supervisory management was a process of general characteristics that included leadership, managing human resources, planning, organizing, and evaluation and feedback, and specific characteristics that were part of a system and an on-going process.

Arminio and Creamer (2001) offer the following as a grounded definition of high quality supervision:

Quality supervision is an educational endeavor demonstrated through principled practices with a dual focus on institutional and individual needs. It requires (a) synergistic relationships between supervisor and staff members, (b) ubiquitous involvement with and constant nurturing of staff members and (c) a stable and supportive institutional environment to be effective. (p. 42)

In recognizing the dual focus on institutional and individual needs, Winston and Creamer (1997) defined supervision in higher education as “a management function intended to promote the achievement of institutional goals and to enhance the personal and professional capabilities and performance of staff” (p. 186). They proposed a theoretical model of effective supervision, called synergistic supervision. Characteristics of synergistic supervision include: dual focus; joint effort; two-way communication; focus on competence (knowledge, work-related skills, personal and professional skills, and attitudes); goals; a systematic and ongoing process; and growth orientation.

The dual focus in synergistic supervision emphasizes that both the goals of the institution and unit are accomplished as well as the personal and professional goals of staff. Staff members need to be involved in setting and accomplishing goals. When supervisors and staff have relationships built on trust, respect, openness, and mutuality, and work together to establish the staff's personal and professional goals, the staff members are more likely to show loyalty to the supervisor and the institution. This cooperative activity involves a joint effort, with both supervisors and staff making contributions. This combination of energy makes the approach synergistic, with the outcome equal to more than the sum of its parts. Two-way communication is more likely to occur when a high level of trust has been established between the supervisor and staff members and will create a climate in which honest and direct feedback is given.

Synergistic supervision also focuses on competence (Winston & Creamer, 1997). Competence in student affairs includes knowledge and information about

student development; legal, professional, and ethical standards; and institutional policies. There is also an expectation of competence in work-related skills, personal and professional skills, and appropriate attitudes.

With a focus on growth orientation rather than correcting problems or discipline, staff can benefit from a work place that is stimulating and rewarding (Winston & Creamer, 1997). When potential problems are identified, the proactivity aspect of synergistic supervision allows problems to be identified early, and the supervisor and staff member can work together on the resolution of issues.

Goal-based synergistic supervision carries an expectation that goals are periodically reviewed and evaluated and that supervisor and staff meet regularly to monitor progress and make adjustments. Synergistic supervision is a systematic and ongoing process that becomes a routine part of professional life. Holistically, synergistic supervision responds to not only people's professional concerns but also their personal attitudes and beliefs: "Synergistic supervision concentrates on helping staff become more effective in their jobs and personal lives, and supports them in their quest for career advancement" (Winston & Creamer, 1997, p. 211).

The definition of synergistic supervision offered by Winston and Creamer (1997) is consistent with fundamental values of the student affairs profession. Synergistic supervision's focus on meeting both the goals of the organization and the personal and professional goals of the individual supports core values based on human dignity, equality, and community (Winston & Creamer, 1997). Both

organizations and individuals benefit when "...employees are viewed as individuals with diverse talents that can be tapped and developed..." (Dalton, 1996, p. 499) and "if the goals of the organization and the individual are met, then the supervisor is successful" (Saunders, et al., 2000, p. 182). Focusing on the people who work in student affairs indicates the centrality of the student affairs profession's concern for people (Winston & Creamer, 1997) and enhancing the development of staff as well as students is consistent with the profession's values (Saunders, et al., 2000). Carpenter (2001) also believes that "nothing is more important to effective practice in student affairs administration than the people who serve the students and manage the institution" (p. 211).

Supervision as a component of staffing practices or personnel management.

Supervision is often viewed as one of the interrelated functions of staffing practices, along with recruitment, selection, orientation and departure of employees; performance appraisal; and professional development (Carpenter, Torres & Winston, 2001). Winston and Creamer (1997) identify similar complex, overlapping components of staffing systems that include recruitment and selection, orientation to position, supervision, staff development and performance appraisal. They note, however, that most colleges and universities conceptually merge the topics of supervision, staff development and performance evaluation into a general discussion about staffing practices or personnel management. Another perspective from Winston et al. (2001) separates the functions as selection, orientation, supervision, development and evaluation. Conley (2001)

identified a lack of attention paid to the separation of employees and recommended that staffing models be extended to "...include mechanisms for coping with employee separation and for helping staff through the transition process" (p. 63). Although all these separate functions or components are critical, most of the student affairs literature focuses on one of the components rather than the integration of all of them (Winston et al., 2001).

Personnel management skills were ranked most important among skills needed for their positions by mid-level student affairs administrators (Fey & Carpenter, 1996). At times, supervision is not even included in the range of personnel management skills. Chief Student Affairs Officers (CSAOs) ranked, by importance, personnel management skills in the middle of seven functional categories of competencies they seek when hiring for mid-level student affairs positions (Gordon, Borders Strode, & Mann, 1993). However, supervision was not one of the five specific skills listed in the personnel management category, which included dealing effectively with interpersonal problems, providing effective staff evaluation and feedback, allowing for due process, staffing equitably according to department needs, and developing behavioral job descriptions (Gordon et al., 1993). This in spite of the fact that CSAOs ranked staff supervision as the most important area of expertise or knowledge in the performance of duties common to CSAOs and that a substantial percentage of their time was spent on staff supervision and personnel administration (Lunsford, 1984).

Supervision as a component of staff development.

Staff development can provide learning and growth opportunities for employees, which can enhance both their personal and professional lives, ultimately benefiting the organization. “Optimally, it is a process that leads to the development of quality professional staff and, in turn, to organizational effectiveness” (Bryan & Schwartz, 1998, p. 99). Development of the organization and the institution’s needs and goals determine the way staff development is conceived and implemented and sets the context for enhancement of individual performance (DeCoster & Brown, 1991). Staff development can serve as a bridge between graduate education and professional practice for new professionals and should provide a baseline for content and skills training (Dalton, 1991). It is most effective when it focuses on the individual and the institution and includes both professional and personal development (Hirt & Winston, 2003).

One of the most important skill areas in staff development should be training of supervisors. Staff development activities and staff supervision should be integrated for maximum effectiveness (Winston & Creamer, 1998). Carpenter (2001) sees staff development as tightly coupled with supervision; however, most of the discussion in the literature is about the other aspects of staff development and there is generally little mention of supervision. In actuality, there are no prescribed guidelines and little consistency in staff development programs in student affairs divisions, if programs are offered at all. There is also a lack of agreement on the essential knowledge and skills necessary for professional

practice (Dalton, 1991). Even in a description of model staff development programs in student affairs divisions at four universities (Grace-Odeleye, 1998), supervisory training is one of many competing elements of staff development and is not included in recommendations to maintain and support staff development programs.

Seasoned professionals can use opportunities in their supervisory relationships to influence the quality and character of professional development of new professionals (Cooper & Miller, 1998). The role of the supervisor in providing professional development opportunities is especially crucial given the varied educational background and experience new employees bring to the organization.

Supervision from different perspectives.

Specific perspectives or aspects of supervision have been reviewed in the literature from other professions. Some authors have looked to business and industry and their human resource practices for applicability to student affairs. Others have examined supervision at different levels in the administrative structure.

Dalton (1996) recognizes changes taking place in American business and industry that require more flexible, creative, and team-oriented workplaces. Changes in technology, competition and consumer demands are also becoming increasingly common in American colleges and universities. Dalton believes this orientation toward flexibility and change will benefit from supervisors who are visionary leaders. This orientation will also benefit from practical managers with

skills of articulating goals and motivating staff to commit to them. Miller and Winston (1991) also recommend looking to business to guide evaluations of student affairs practitioners by qualified supervisors and transferring the emphasis placed on evaluation from the corporate community to higher education. Taylor and von Destinon (2000) suggest that because of the similarities between human resource departments and student services, student services can model human resources' staff training and development programs. Holmes (1998) also believes performance-based human resource development practices are relevant in student affairs.

Some of the research on supervision in student affairs has focused on the level of the professional in the administrative structure recognizing that supervision is different for employees at the entry level than for those in middle management positions. Schneider (2002) attempts to fill the gap left by graduate preparation programs in helping new professionals enhance their supervisory ability by using multiple frames to view the issues supervisors may face. Schneider (2002) believes that supervisors should act as architects, catalysts, advocates, or interpreters using approaches tailored to each situation, individual, or team. Understanding and viewing the organization in which they work through these multiple lenses will lead to improved decision making, working relationships, and performance (Schneider, 2002). In studying novice supervisors, Waite (1993) found that graduate students in a supervision class had different expectations of supervision and defined it differently than did practitioners and in the way supervision is described in the literature. They held

unrealistic expectations of supervisory traits including skills, experience, knowledge, and dispositions, and they identified supervisor tasks including cheerleading and modeling not identified in the literature.

Fey and Carpenter's (1996) survey of 276 mid-level Student Affairs Administrators revealed that mid-level administrators ranked personnel management skills (presumably to include supervision) as the most important of seven skills categories for their positions. Mills (2000) notes that while middle managers may have responsibility for supervising staff, they often lack the authority for making staffing levels and compensation decisions. He believes "the ability to manage staff successfully is generally the determinant of success for the middle manager" (p. 141). The quality of the relationship that midlevel administrators have with their supervisors is important to them and when they perceive high levels of career support, leading to higher morale, they are less likely to intend to leave (Johnsrud, Heck, & Rosser, 2000). Additionally, providing recognition for growth and accomplishment is one of the most significant acts in the supervision of middle managers (Ellis & Moon, 1991).

Persistence in the Student Affairs Profession

The largest proportion of an institution's (Hirt, Collins, & Plummer, 2005) and a student affairs division's (Barr, Desler, & Associates, 2000; Dalton, 1996) budget is spent on personnel. Lowering staff turnover and increasing retention at the institutional level and persistence in the profession then becomes a critical issue for colleges and universities today (Blackhurst, 2000; Evans, 1988; Rosser & Javinar, 2003; Scott, 2000; Taylor & von Destinon, 2000; Woodard & Komives,

1990). While staff turnover provides advantages to institutions through the new perspectives staff members bring, opportunities for increased diversity, and potential salary savings, disadvantages include additional recruitment costs, loss of expertise and stability and training costs (Johnsrud, Heck, & Rosser, 2000; Lorden, 1998). When staff members leave, the institution loses their experience, job knowledge, and skills that have contributed to the effective management of the institution (Johnsrud & Rosser, 1997). New staff members' persistence at the employing institution and in the student affairs profession can be enhanced by the support of good, caring supervisors (Woodard & Komives, 1990). In fact, Harned and Murphy (1998) believe that "...the relationship with one's first immediate supervisor can be critical in creating a lasting commitment to the field".

There is concern about retention and the numbers of professional staff in student affairs who intend to leave the field (Bender, 1980; Evans, 1988; Lawing, Moore & Groseth, 1982; Lorden, 1998; Ward, 1995). Several hallmark studies on retention in student affairs were conducted in the early 1980s. These studies were followed by additional research published through 1999 but since that time there has been a dearth of research on the topic of retention.

Only 36% of NASPA Region II student affairs professionals surveyed by Bender (1980) planned to spend their entire career in student affairs. In a small study of graduate students with housing assistantships, Hancock (1988) found that ten percent of the students planned to leave the profession immediately after graduation. Ting and Watt (1999) found that approximately one-third of

professionals in their study intended to leave student affairs within five years even though they had been in the field for a relatively long period of time.

Concern about the intent to leave the profession increases when looking at the numbers of professionals who actually do leave the profession. In a study of 170 graduates of a master's program in student personnel at an eastern university, 66% of the graduates reported they were working in the student affairs field (Holmes, Verrier & Chisholm, 1983). However, the rate of participation dropped to 39% by the sixth year of employment (Holmes et al., 1983). Burns (1982) found that 64% of the 192 preparation program graduates within the last five years from two eastern universities surveyed remained in the profession. For those who graduated more than five years previously, the percentage of those remaining in student affairs dropped to 49% (Burns, 1982).

Although the number of professional positions at all levels in student affairs has grown since these earlier studies, the longevity of department heads and others in upper management positions limits the upward mobility of those in entry and middle level positions (Benke & Disque, 1990; Evans, 1988; Lorden, 1998; Sagaria & Johnsrud, 1988; White, Webb & Young, 1990). Many professionals find they need to move to a different functional area or to a different institution to advance (Carpenter, Guido-DiBrito & Kelly, 1987; Evans, 1988). Still others may find that the transferable skills developed in student affairs prepared them well for positions outside higher education, and they leave higher education for better paying positions in other fields (Carpenter, 1990; Carpenter, Guido-DiBrito & Kelly, 1987; Conley, 2001; Lorden, 1998).

Commitment to the Profession

It is essential for student affairs professionals to promote their own growth and development in order to be effective practitioners (Bryan & Mullendore, 1990; Cutler, 2003; DeCoster & Brown, 1991). Student affairs practitioners demonstrate their commitment to the profession by improving and expanding their skills through membership in professional associations, attendance at conferences, making presentations at conferences, and through research and publication. These professional development activities provide student affairs practitioners opportunities to refine and expand their skills and to improve their job performance, thus benefiting not only the practitioners, but the employing institution as well (Schwartz & Bryan, 1998). Student affairs professionals can gain learning experiences through involvement in professional associations that they can not receive at their own institution (Reesor, 2002). The fulfillment an employee gains through professional association involvement can also be brought back to the job setting where there may be little opportunity for similar activities (Hamrick & Hemphill, 2002).

Past presidents of the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) and the National Association of Personnel Administrators (NASPA) advise student affairs professionals to pursue opportunities for professional development and commit to long-term professional development goals even at the beginning of their careers (Cooper, et al., 1999). Some student affairs divisions offer formal staff development programs that provide opportunities to improve existing skills as well as develop new ones (Schwartz & Bryan, 1998).

However, formal staff development programs are not available for student affairs professionals at all institutions, so individuals must often take responsibility to develop their knowledge, skills, and abilities to enhance their work with students and to advance in the profession (Kruger, 2000).

Some have equated commitment to the field with a sense of professionalism and professional identity. "One sign of professionalism is affiliation with associations devoted to the advancement of the field" (Winston & Creamer, 1997, p. 98). Nuss (2000) believes that "at a minimum, anyone intending a serious career in student affairs should be a member of at least one professional association" (p. 493). Student affairs professionals commit to encouraging students to become involved and connected. Professionals working in student affairs have that same need for involvement and commitment, which can be enhanced through their involvement in professional organizations (Hamrick & Hemphill, 2002; Reesor, 2002). Professional associations not only provide opportunities for leadership skills development and a vehicle for job searches, they can offer individual professionals training, access to information and networking opportunities with professionals at other institutions (Belch & Strange, 1995; Blackhurst, Brandt, & Kalinowski, 1998; Bryan & Mullendore, 1990; Chernow, Cooper & Winston, 2003; Cooper et al., 1999; Ellis, 2002; Harned & Murphy, 1998; Schwartz & Bryan, 1998). Nuss (2000) summarizes the major reasons professionals join and become involved with associations as to: "...enhance their own professional development; make a contribution to the association; and to help the profession" (p. 499). Chief Student Affairs Officers

acknowledge that "...the personal and professional networks developed through professional associations ... play an integral role in their advancement to the position of CSAO" (Lunsford, 1984, p. 55).

Professional associations remain current with institutional and societal issues facing higher education and student affairs. Student affairs practitioners often learn about critical issues and appropriate responses through their professional associations (Moore & Neuberger, 1998). Members can also reach out to their associations for additional assistance and guidance in the issues they face at their institutions. Not only can members offer expertise to their association colleagues, but they, and in turn their employing institutions, benefit from the collected wisdom and experience of other professionals across the country.

By attending professional conferences and associating with other student affairs professionals, practitioners gain the informal knowledge of those who know how to do the job, thus going beyond what can be learned by reading the literature and in the classroom (Blimling, 2001). Making conference presentations at the local, state, regional, or national level not only helps professionals to develop their communication and public speaking skills but can also advance the profession and reflect a commitment to the profession (DeCoster & Brown, 1991; Kruger, 2000).

The importance of a commitment to the profession is emphasized by two major professional organizations in the student affairs field. Both the NASPA Standards of Professional Practice (1998) and the ACPA Ethics Statement

(1993) identify the contribution professionals can make to the profession by participating in association activities and conducting and reporting the results of research. NASPA members are expected to contribute to the development of the profession by enhancing their own personal knowledge and skills, facilitate the professional growth of their staff, and conduct and report research (NASPA, 1998). NASPA also expects its members to agree with the mission and goals of their employing institutions. The ACPA Ethics Statement (1993) specifies four areas of ethical standards for student affair professionals. These include professional responsibility and competence; identifying learning opportunities and reducing barriers that inhibit development; displaying responsibility to their institutions; and demonstrating a responsibility to society.

Contributing to the development of the profession includes conducting and reporting research (ACPA Ethics Statement, 1993). Lawing, Moore and Groseth (1982) found that student affairs practitioners who expected to remain in the field were more likely to have written articles published in professional journals. Submitting original research to professional publications not only contributes to individual professional growth but is another way to demonstrate a commitment to the profession (DeCoster & Brown, 1991).

Summary

CSAOs and midlevel administrators consider supervision skills important in student affairs (Cooper, et al., 1999; Lunsford, 1984; Saunders & Cooper, 1999). CAS Standards (2003) also recognize the importance of supervision in training new professionals. Yet many supervisors enter the student affairs field

with little supervisory experience and are given little training by their organizations (Dalton, 1996; Schuh & Carlisle, 1991; Stock-Ward & Javorek, 2003; Winston, et al., 2001; Woodard & Komives, 1990). Additionally, student affairs staffs often indicate that they do not receive adequate supervision (Arminio & Creamer, 2001; Saunders et al., 2000; Winston & Creamer, 1997). There is a perception that professionals who are performing well in their jobs do not need supervision or that supervision is seen as important only when dealing with employees who have problems or are new to the organization (Winston & Creamer, 1997; 1998).

The literature review suggests that supervision is often viewed as one of the interrelated functions of staffing practices, along with recruitment, selection, orientation and departure of employees; performance appraisal; and professional development (Carpenter, 2001; Carpenter, et al., 2001; Dalton, 1996; Winston & Creamer, 1997, 1998). Although all these separate functions or components are critical, most of the student affairs literature focuses on one of the components rather than the integration of all of them.

Specific perspectives or aspects of supervision have been reviewed in other literature. Some authors have looked to business and industry and their human resource practices for applicability to student affairs (Dalton, 1996; Holmes, 1998; Miller & Winston, 1991; Taylor & von Destinon, 2000). Others have examined supervision at different levels in the administrative structure (Ellis & Moon, 1991; Fey & Carpenter, 1996; Mills, 2000; Schneider, 2002; Waite, 1993).

Staff turnover creates both opportunities and costs for institutions of higher education and student affairs divisions. Staff vacancies provide opportunities to bring in employees with new perspectives, to increase diversity in the work force, and realize potential salary savings. However, staff turnover results in a loss of expertise and stability and the investment made in employee training as well as an increase in additional recruitment costs (Johnsrud et al., 2000; Johnsrud & Rosser, 1997; Lorden, 1998). Although the number of professional positions in student affairs has grown, the longevity of department heads and others in upper management positions limits the upward mobility of those in entry and middle level positions (Benke & Disque, 1990; Evans, 1988; Lorden, 1998; Sagaria & Johnsrud, 1988; White et al., 1990). This has led to concern about retention of professional staff in student affairs (Bender, 1980; Evans, 1988; Lawing et al., 1982; Lorden, 1998; Ward, 1995).

There is also concern about the commitment of student affairs practitioners to the profession. It is essential for student affairs professionals to promote their own growth and development in order to be effective practitioners (Cutler, 2003; DeCoster & Brown, 1991). While some student affairs divisions offer formal staff development programs and training opportunities, individuals need to take responsibility to develop their knowledge, skills, and abilities to enhance their work with students and advance in the profession (Kruger, 2000; Schwartz & Bryan, 1998). Not only do student affairs practitioners benefit individually by improving their skills and job performance through involvement in professional organizations, attending and making presentations at conferences

and conducting and reporting research, their employing institutions benefit through better trained employees able to contribute to the goals of the institution (DeCoster & Brown, 1991; Lawing et al., 1982; Reesor, 2002; Schwartz & Bryan, 1998).

Winston and Creamer (1997) proposed a theoretical model of effective supervision, called synergistic supervision. The dual focus in synergistic supervision emphasizes the accomplishment of the goals of the institution and unit as well as the personal and professional goals of individual staff. The definition of synergistic supervision offered by Winston and Creamer is consistent with fundamental values of the student affairs profession in its dedication to serving the interests of individuals and society (Winston & Creamer, 1997; Young, 1996) and enhancing the development of staff as well as students (Saunders et al., 2000).

This research project will be helpful in understanding how the practice of synergistic supervision, with its dual focus on benefits for both the institution and the individual, can improve persistence and increase demonstrated commitment to the profession. The research will fill a gap in the current literature, which fails to describe connections between supervision, retention and commitment to the profession.

Chapter III

Research Methods

The purpose of this study was to determine if the perception of behaviors and characteristics of synergistic supervision influence the persistence of student affairs staff in the profession and their commitment to the profession. Persistence was defined by an employee's intention to continue a career in student affairs, regardless of the institution in which they are employed. Commitment to the profession was defined by employee membership in professional organizations, conference attendance, conference participation such as presentations, and involvement in research and publication.

Winston and Creamer (1997) developed a theoretical model of effective supervision called synergistic supervision. Synergistic supervision has a two-dimensional focus, one on the goals of the institution and one on the goals of the individual. Very little research has been done to test this model. Saunders et al. (2000) developed and tested a Synergistic Supervision Scale that supported the validity of the model. The validity of the Synergistic Supervision Scale was also tested in the research conducted by Tull (2004).

Design

In their review of the literature on supervision in student affairs from 1969 through 1999, Cooper et al. (2001) noted that few of the studies – qualitative or quantitative - involved rigorous research. They recognize that “part of the difficulty of completing rigorous research about supervision and professional development is the challenge of obtaining outcome measures other than

perceptions or satisfaction” (p. 90). They go on to suggest that both staff members and supervisors who participate in a thorough study of the efficacy of staff supervision may perceive potential risks related to their involvement, which may make research more difficult. However, they believe that until supervision is adequately researched, the elements that comprise effective supervisory performance will not be fully understood. It was important to provide assurance to participants in this study that results would not be used in a way that identified individual supervisors.

This research project included both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection to better understand the concept of synergistic supervision. A survey was conducted to gather any evidence whether or not synergistic supervision was being practiced in student affairs at public universities in Michigan. Interviews were conducted to elicit views and opinions from the participants that would not have emerged from the survey data and to focus on the supervision experiences of an appropriate sample of student affairs professionals. The two methodologies would help determine what impact, if any synergistic supervision has on persistence in and commitment to the profession. Data were collected sequentially, first through an on-line survey and then through interviews. Both stages of data collection were given equal priority and results were integrated at the data analysis phase to address the following research questions:

Is synergistic supervision practiced in the student affairs profession at public universities in Michigan?

Do individuals' perceptions of synergistic supervision received and its focus on meeting the goals of the institution and the personal and professional goals of the employee influence persistence in the student affairs profession?

Do individuals' perceptions of synergistic supervision received influence commitment to the student affairs profession?

Quantitative

Instrumentation.

In building a staffing model in student affairs, Winston and Creamer (1997) developed and administered a nationwide survey to examine staffing practices. The survey covered the areas of staff recruitment and selection, new position orientation, job satisfaction, supervisory approaches and content, staff development organization and activities, and performance appraisal practices. Respondents included staff at all levels of the organization. Issues related to both supervision given and supervision received were included. Saunders et al. (2000) explored the validity of the Winston and Creamer staffing model by developing the Synergistic Supervision Scale (SSS). The SSS measures staff member perceptions of the following supervisor behaviors: concern about staff members' personal and career development; equitable staff treatment; and management that encourages productivity, cooperative problem solving with staff, systematic goal setting, and two-way communication and mutual feedback.

The SSS included 22 items intended to assess the degree to which a supervisor was perceived, by the supervisee, to demonstrate synergistic

supervision behaviors. Subjects rated the frequency of each described behavior based on their perceptions of their current supervisory relationship. Ratings were on a five-point Likert scale (1=never or almost never; 2=seldom; 3=sometimes; 4=often; 5=always or almost always).

I developed a questionnaire (Appendix A) consisting of six questions, informed by the SSS, to address participants' perceptions of their supervisor's use of synergistic supervision. Questions reflected the components of synergistic supervision including dual focus; joint effort; two-way communication; focus on competence; goals; a systematic and ongoing process; and growth orientation. Participants were asked to rate the frequency of each described behavior based on their perceptions of their current supervisory relationship. Ratings were on a five-point Likert scale (1=never or almost never; 2=seldom; 3=sometimes; 4=often; 5=always or almost always).

Participants were asked to provide demographic information regarding job title, educational background and plans, gender, race/ethnicity, age, and years in the profession. Responses to the questions were used to examine potential generational differences, or differences based on respondents' race, gender, years in the profession, or functional areas in which they work. Participants were also asked to list membership in professional organizations as an additional measure to determine their level of commitment to the profession.

Methodological considerations.

After designing the survey, I had to determine how it would be administered. The ubiquity of the internet and access to the World Wide Web

(WWW or Web) has allowed researchers new opportunities for data collection (Griffis, Goldsby, & Cooper, 2003). Expanded access to email gave researchers the new option of sending surveys via email rather than through traditional mail. The novelty of early email surveys may have contributed to faster response rates but the email format limited the use of high quality images and color in questionnaires (Tse, 1998). The use and design of surveys embedded in email messages evolved into Web-based surveys (White, Carey, & Dailey, 2001).

Advantages in using Web-based surveys include a reduction in cost compared to paper surveys sent through the mail, increased speed and efficiency of data collection, and ease of connecting collected data directly to a database that can be accessed by a statistical package (Griffis, et al., 2003; Ray & Tabor, 2003; Schaefer & Dillman, 1998; Sheehan & Hoy, 1999; Tingling, Parent, & Wade, 2003; White, et al., 2001; Yun & Trumbo, 2000). As Web-based survey methodology became more readily available in the mid to late 1990s, disadvantages included the large startup costs and the level of technical sophistication required to design Web sites (Tingling, et al., 2003). These disadvantages have been minimized with an increase in the number of companies providing low cost, survey-hosting or “turnkey” Web sites and offering survey templates, which require little design technical expertise on the part of the researcher.

Another disadvantage of Web-based surveys is that in order to participate, subjects must have access to the internet and have a minimum level of comfort in completing a survey online (Ray & Tabor, 2003; Sheehan & Hoy, 1999;

Tingling, et al., 2003). While this may have been a major concern ten years ago, use of the internet has grown substantially since that time and Web-based surveys can be as effective as mail surveys when the sample demographics fit and respondents can access the Web site (Griffis, et al., 2003; McCabe, Boyd, Couper, Crawford, & D'Arcy, 2002; Ray & Tabor, 2003). Internet users may differ from those without internet access in socioeconomic and education levels and may cause sampling errors if the general population is the target of a study (Ray & Tabor, 2003). For this study, potential survey subjects were not drawn from the general population but from employees of public Michigan universities. University employees have access to and familiarity with the use of the internet so the use of an on-line survey should not inhibit their participation.

Researchers have come to different conclusions about whether response rates are higher for Web-based surveys or for paper and pencil surveys (McCabe, et al., 2002; Ray & Tabor, 2003; Sheehan & Hoy, 2003; Tingling, et al., 2003; Yun & Trumbo, 2000). Response rates may be increased through improved design, better targeting of respondents, and identification of interested parties (Tingling, et al., 2003) and through multiple contacts with subjects requesting participation (Schaefer & Dillman, 1998). An acceptable response rate for this study would be 25.0% to 30.0%.

Participants.

There are 15 public universities in the State of Michigan, with student enrollments ranging from 3,225 to 44,452 (Higher Education Directory, 2005). Each of these institutions has an identifiable Chief Student Affairs Officer

(CSAO), with varying titles of Dean of Students; Vice President of Student Affairs, Student Services, or Student Life; Associate or Vice Provost; or Associate or Vice Chancellor. The first stage of a multistage sampling procedure was to identify student affairs staff members at the Michigan public institutions. Since one of the components of synergistic supervision to be explored was related to commitment to the profession, I did not use professional organization membership lists as a way to identify respondents. Additionally, professional organization membership lists would not provide as complete a list of current professionals working in the student affairs field as would gathering information directly from the public institutions in Michigan. The 2005/06 NASPA membership directory lists 133 professional affiliates. Three of the 15 public universities do not hold institutional membership and no professional affiliates are listed.

Names and email addresses of 553 student affairs professionals were identified through institutional websites and through organizational charts obtained from each university. Potential survey respondents worked primarily in the areas of housing and residence life, student life, career services, academic advising, minority student programs and student affairs administration. Identified staff were emailed an invitation to participate in the survey.

Data collection procedures.

Data collection was done through a Web-based survey and participants were asked to complete the survey instrument online. Student affairs professionals at the fifteen public Michigan universities with identifiable email addresses were emailed a letter that included a description of the study and

potential implications their participation may have. It is rare that a student affairs professional working at a public university in Michigan would not have a minimal level of experience and comfort in using computers, an email address and internet access and experience in its use. Use of a Web-based survey for this study did not limit participation.

Participants were able to access the instrument from a link to a Web address provided in the email. Participants who visited the web site read information about the purpose of the study and informed consent. Those who chose to complete the survey had to select a *continue* button to participate in the survey, thereby giving their informed consent. Visitors to the web site could choose to exit the site before viewing the survey and could exit the survey at any time. A copy of the informed consent form that was used in the on-line survey is provided in Appendix B.

Participants were given three weeks to complete the survey. Steps were taken in administering and following up on the survey to obtain a high response rate. A reminder email was sent at the beginning of the second week and the beginning of the third week. Each reminder email contained a link to the survey Website. Contact information for the researcher, the dissertation chair and the Michigan State University Institutional Review Board was provided in the emails and on the survey Website so participants had the opportunity to contact any of the three with questions or concerns they may have had about the study or their participation. Copies of the initial email, the second reminder and the final reminder are included in Appendices C, D, and E.

Methods of analysis.

Descriptive analyses of survey responses were conducted to classify and summarize characteristics of the sample. Inferential statistics, specifically chi-square tests, Pearson correlation coefficients, Spearman rho and t-tests were conducted to determine significant differences in responses to survey questions by various groups.

Qualitative

Methodological considerations.

One method of qualitative data gathering is conducting interviews. One of the advantages of interviews is their adaptability. The interviewer can follow up on a response leading to a more in-depth answer (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2005) and interviews allow the researcher control over the line of questioning (Creswell, 2003). The use of open-ended questions allows respondents to answer using their own terms rather than selecting from a fixed set of responses (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2005).

A disadvantage of interviews is that there is direct interaction between the researcher and the interviewee which can lead to subjectivity and bias (Creswell, 2003; Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2005). Tape recordings of the interviews provide an unbiased account of each interview for data analysis. Another limitation of interviews as a research method is that not all people are equally articulate and perceptive and information is filtered through the views of the interviewee (Creswell, 2003). Even though there are some limitations with interviews, as there are with all data collection strategies, I decided to use interviews to collect

qualitative data. Interviews allowed participants to describe their experiences and provided the opportunity for themes related to supervision and persistence in and commitment to the student affairs profession to be developed.

Instrumentation.

Interview questions were developed using a semi-structured open-ended protocol, informed by the Winston and Creamer staffing survey (1997). Questions asked participants to reflect on the personal experiences that have encouraged them to remain in the student affairs profession. They were also asked what they do to keep new professionals in the field, their definition of commitment to the profession and how they developed that commitment, and how supervision has played a role in their retention in and commitment to the profession. Interview questions differed from survey questions in that they focused not only on participants' perceptions of synergistic supervision received but also on the components of synergistic supervision interview participants practiced. In addition, demographic information about the participants (i.e., age, gender, educational background, and years in the profession) was gathered. (Appendix F)

Participants.

Interview participants were purposefully selected from student affairs professionals employed by public Michigan universities with at least five to ten years of experience in the profession. I asked my colleagues working in the areas of Career Services, Housing and Residential Life, and Student Life to provide several names of their colleagues working at public Michigan

universities. I contacted student affairs professionals working in each of these three areas from the list of names provided and requested interviews.

Participants were selected for interviews based on their availability and while they were in the pool of potential participants for the online survey it is unknown if they completed the survey. A face-to-face interview lasting approximately one hour was conducted with each of nine participants at their work sites.

Data collection procedures.

One-on-one, hour-long, face-to-face interviews were conducted with each participant at a site chosen by the participant. A semi-structured open-ended protocol was used to ask questions about their plans to remain in the student affairs profession and ways they have demonstrated their commitment to the profession. As interviewer, I decided the sequence and wording of questions during the course of the interview following the opening question (Patton, 2002).

Each participant was given contact information for the researcher, the dissertation chair and the Michigan State University Institutional Review Board so they had the opportunity to contact any of the three with questions or concerns they may have had about the study or their participation. Each participant was asked to sign an informed consent form (see Appendix G) before participating in the interview. Identity of the participants was kept confidential and pseudonyms were used.

Methods of analysis.

Notes were taken during the interviews, which were tape recorded and then transcribed. A first read of the data provided a general sense of the

information and a general impression of its depth, credibility and use (Creswell, 2003). The data were reviewed again to identify emerging common themes. Detailed analysis began with a coding process that was used to break down the data into major topics and unique topics. A descriptive narrative discussed each theme and sub-theme, which was then analyzed to interpret, or make meaning of, the data.

Human Subjects Review

Prior to the start of this study, I received the necessary approval for research involving human subjects from the Michigan State University Institutional Review Board and from Grand Valley State University Human Research Review Committee.

Limitations

Survey participants were identified through university Web sites and organizational charts. Examination of all university Web sites and organizational charts in the United States for potential participants would not be possible, so only public universities in Michigan were included in the study. This limited the number of potential participants to approximately five hundred and may have excluded some individuals who are not listed on Web sites or those in units without accessible and detailed organizational charts.

Participants were employees of Michigan public universities and were not evenly divided among institutional types, sizes and functional areas of employment. Results of the study may not be generalizable to other universities in the United States. In addition, the structure of student affairs divisions is

defined differently at various institutions. A functional area considered part of a student affairs division at one university may not be part of the student affairs division at another. Survey respondents may not be representative of all functional areas.

An on-line survey may have limited participation of some participants who are not familiar with the methodology or distrust the security of the information they provide.

The purposive sampling procedure for interviews decreased the generalizability of the findings. In-person interviews also have limitations. Informants' responses in interviews may be biased by the researcher's presence. Additionally, not all informants are equally articulate or perceptive. The findings in this qualitative research method may be subject to other interpretations.

Chapter IV

Data Analysis

The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of individuals' perceptions of synergistic supervision received on persistence in and commitment to the student affairs profession. This was accomplished by the collection of data in an on-line survey and through nine interviews conducted with selected participants. The findings from the study are presented in this chapter. The first section outlines the basic descriptive statistics of survey participants. The second section presents analysis of data collected through the interviews.

Quantitative: Data Collection and Response Rate

Data for the quantitative portion of this study were collected through the use of an online survey. Demographic information was collected so that answers to survey questions could be examined for differences in responses by Position Title, Highest Degree Earned, Major Field of Highest Degree Earned, if respondents were pursuing further degrees, Sex, Racial/Ethnic Background, Years Worked as a Student Affairs Professional, Membership in National, Regional/State Professional Organizations or Functional Areas of Responsibility. The survey included six questions related to supervision received. (Appendix A)

A total of 553 subjects were sent an initial email message (Appendix E) on Monday, April 3, 2006 describing the study and its implications, and asking for their participation. Subjects were given a link in the email message connecting them to the online survey. Twenty-seven (27) emails were returned with a notice that there was either a delivery failure or that the person no longer worked at the

institution. All remaining subjects were sent a second reminder email message (Appendix F) on Monday, April 10, 2006, and a third and final reminder email on Monday, April 17, 2006. (Appendix G)

A final population of 526 participants were eligible to complete the survey after the purging process. Of those, 240 participants visited the survey website. However, three participants chose to exit the survey rather than agree to the consent form and continue. This left 237 participants who at least partially completed the survey, resulting in a 45.1% response rate. This response rate was calculated after purging those participants who exited the survey website and those who did not receive any of the email messages due to incorrect or faulty addresses or because they had left their institutions.

The use of an online survey expedited the amount of time required for data collection and reduced the number of errors and missing values for survey responses. The 45.1% response rate was deemed acceptable and exceeded the expectation of a 25.0% to 30.0% response rate. It was thought that the ease with which respondents could respond to the survey by clicking on a link in the email message contributed to the high response rate. The survey length (six questions and demographic data) and the time it took to complete the survey (less than ten minutes) may have also contributed to the positive response rate for the survey.

Descriptive Characteristics of Respondents

Position title.

Two hundred twenty-four respondents (94.5% of the total responding to the survey) identified their position title. Five (2.3%) indicated their position title

was Associate/Assistant Vice President; three (1.4%) indicated the title of Dean; six (2.7%) Associate/Assistant Dean; 33 (14.9%) Department Head/Director; 73 (32.9%) Associate/Assistant Department Head/Director; 49 (22.1%) Residence Area Coordinator; 36 (16.2%) Coordinator; and 19 (8.6%) as Other. Position titles provided by those who checked the *Other* category for Position Title included Counselor (five); Academic Advisor (three); Ombudsman (three), and one each in Information Technology in Housing; Administrative Associate; Manager Job Development; Assistant to the President; Student Activities Supervisor; Librarian; Disability Specialist; and Graduate Administrative Professional. (See Table 1.)

Table 1		
<i>Respondents by Position Title</i>		
Position Title	<i>f</i>	%
Vice President		
Associate/Assistant Vice President	5	2.3
Dean	3	1.4
Associate/Assistant Dean	6	2.7
Department Head/Director	33	14.9
Associate/Assistant Department Head/ Director	73	32.9
Residence Area Coordinator	49	22.1
Coordinator	36	16.2
Other	19	8.6
Total Respondents	224	100.0

Highest degree earned.

Two (.4%) respondents indicated their highest degree earned was a High School and/or Technical School Diploma; three (1.3%) an Associate's degree; 31

(13.0%) a Baccalaureate degree; 167 (74.2%) a Master's degree; and 20 (8.8%) a Doctorate. The two (.4%) respondents who selected the *Other* category for Highest Degree Earned indicated they held a Juris Doctorate and a Counselor Training Certification. (See Table 2.)

Table 2		
<i>Highest Degree Earned by Respondents</i>		
Highest Degree	<i>f</i>	%
High school and/or technical school diploma	2	.4
Associate's	3	1.3
Baccalaureate	31	13.0
Master's	167	74.2
Doctorate	20	8.8
Other	2	.4
Total Respondents	224	100.0

Major field of highest degree earned.

Fifty-six (24.9%) of a total 225 respondents indicated the Major Field of their Highest Degree Earned was in Student Affairs. Twenty-seven (12.0%) indicated Counseling or Counseling Psychology; 48 (21.3%) indicated Higher Education; 20 (8.9%) indicated Business; and 74 (32.9%) indicated *Other*. In the *Other* category, Education was mentioned most often as the Major Field of the Highest Degree Earned by 15 (6.7%) respondents; Public Administration by eight (3.6%); and Communications, Human Resources and Recreation Management by four (1.8%) each. Major fields of English, Law, Physical Education/Exercise

Science, Social Work and Sociology were indicated by three respondents each. Major fields of Engineering, Library Science, Natural Resource Management, and Political Science were indicated by two respondents each. Each of the following Major Field of Highest Degree Earned was indicated by one respondent: Administrative Management; American Literature; Anthropology; Architecture; Criminal Justice and History; Divinity; Economics; English and German; History; Human Ecology; Humanities; Learning Disabilities; Psychology; Spanish Literature; Sports Administration; and Women's Studies/Gerontology. (See Table 3.)

Table 3		
<i>Major Field of Highest Degree Earned by Respondents</i>		
Major Field	<i>f</i>	%
Student Affairs	56	24.9
Counseling or Counseling Psychology	27	12.0
Higher Education	48	21.3
Business	20	8.9
Other	74	32.9
Total Respondents	225	100.4

Pursuing further degrees.

Two questions were asked about current and future plans to complete a further degree. Fifty-three (24.1%) of 220 respondents indicated they were currently pursuing further degrees and 167 (75.9%) responded they were not. One hundred twenty-two (56.5%) of the 216 responding to the second question

indicated they planned to pursue a further degree and 94 (43.5%) responded they were not planning to pursue a further degree.

Sex, racial/ethnic background.

Of the 220 respondents who indicated their gender, 141 (64.1%) were female, 79 (35.9%) male. Of the 222 respondents who indicated their racial/ethnic background, 177 (79.5%) indicated they were Caucasian/White and 45 (20.3%) indicated they were a member of a minority group. (See Table 4.)

Table 4		
<i>Racial/Ethnic Background of Respondents</i>		
Race	<i>f</i>	%
African American	32	14.4
Asian American/ Pacific Islander	2	0.9
Caucasian/White American (non-Hispanic)	177	79.7
Hispanic American	4	1.8
Multicultural/Biracial	5	2.3
North American Indigenous/Am. Indian/Native American	2	0.9
Total Respondents	222	100.0

Age.

Twenty-four (10.8%) of the 222 respondents to this question indicated they were 25 or younger; 47 (21.2%) were 26-30; 43 (19.4%) were 31-35; 28 (12.6%) were 36-40; 22 (9.9%) were 41-45; 23 (10.4%) were 46-50; 21 (9.5%) were 51-55; 10 (4.5%) were 56-60; and two (.9%) indicated they were in each of the age ranges of 61-65 and 66 or older. One hundred fourteen (61.4%) of the respondents indicated they were age 35 or younger. (See Table 5.)

Table 5		
<i>Age Range of Respondents</i>		
Age	<i>f</i>	%
25 or younger	24	10.8
26-30	47	21.2
31-35	43	19.4
36-40	28	12.6
41-45	22	9.9
46-50	23	10.4
51-55	21	9.5
56-60	10	4.5
61-65	2	0.9
66 or older	2	0.9
Total Respondents	222	100.1

Years worked in student affairs as a professional.

Forty-two (19.0%) of the 221 respondents to this question indicated they had worked as a student affairs professional for 1-3 years; 53 (24.0%) for 4-6 years; 33 (14.9%) for 7-9 years; 29 (13.1%) for 10-12 years; 14 (6.3%) for 13-15 years; 16 (7.2%) for 16-18 years; 11 (5.0%) for 19-21 years; and 23 (10.4%) for 22 or more years. One hundred twenty eight (57.9%) of the respondents indicated they had worked as a student affairs professional for less than ten years. (See Table 6.)

Membership in national professional organizations.

Sixty of the total 237 survey respondents gave no indication whether or not they held membership in any national professional organizations. Unlike

Table 6***Years worked as Student Affairs Professional***

Years Worked	<i>f</i>	%
1-3	42	19.0
4-6	53	24.0
7-9	33	14.9
10-12	29	13.1
13-15	14	6.3
16-18	16	7.2
19-21	11	5.0
22 or more	23	10.4
Total Respondents	221	100.0

other survey questions that provided options from which survey participants could choose an answer, this question required participants to fill in a blank, listing the names of organizations in which they held membership. This may have led to the large number who did not respond to the question. Six who did respond to the question indicated they held no memberships. The remaining 171 respondents indicated they held membership in 94 different national professional organizations. Membership in ACPA (American College Personnel Association) was indicated most frequently by 68 (39.8%) respondents. Sixty-four (37.4%) listed membership in NASPA: National Association of Student Personnel Administrators; and 30 (17.5%) in ACUHO-I (Association of College and University Housing Officers-International). Other organizations were listed by 18 or fewer respondents. Appendix H includes a complete list of national

professional organizations in which respondents held membership as well as the number reporting as belonging to each organization.

Of the total 171 respondents who indicated national professional organization membership, 101 (59.1%) reported membership in either ACPA or NASPA or both and 70 (40.9%) did not belong to either ACPA or NASPA. Seventy-one (41.5%) of the 171 respondents reported holding membership in just one national organization; 57 (33.3%) in two; 28 (16.4%) in three; seven (4.1%) in four; three (1.8%) in five; three (1.8%) in six; one (.6%) in eight; and one (.6%) held membership in ten national professional organizations.

Membership in regional and state professional organizations.

One hundred eighteen of the total 237 survey respondents gave no indication whether or not they held membership in any regional or state professional organizations. Unlike other survey questions that provided options from which survey participants could choose an answer, but similar to the question regarding national professional organization membership, this question required participants to fill in a blank listing the names of organizations in which they held membership. This may have led to the large number who did not respond to the question, just as it may have contributed to the response rate in the preceding question. Three who did respond to the question indicated they held no memberships. The remaining 116 respondents indicated they held membership in 63 different regional or state professional organizations. Membership in GLACUHO (Great Lakes Association of College and University Housing Officers) was most frequently mentioned by 39 (33.6%) respondents,

followed by twenty-seven (23.3%) who indicated membership in a state student personnel association (MCPA). Other organizations were listed by seven or fewer respondents. Appendix I includes a complete list of regional or state professional organizations in which respondents held membership as well as the number reporting as belonging to each organization.

Of the total 116 respondents who indicated regional or state professional organization membership, 66 (56.9%) reported membership in either GLACUHO or MCPA, or both. Sixty-nine (58.0%) of the total 116 respondents indicated they held membership in just one state or regional organization; 39 (32.8%) in two; 5 (4.2%) in three; and 3 (2.5%) in four organizations.

Functional areas of responsibility.

There is no one organizational structure for functional areas in student affairs. Because student affairs divisions are defined differently at institutions, a functional area is considered part of student affairs at one university but not at another. For example, at some institutions, career services functions is part of the student affairs organization. At other institutions student affairs functions may be more decentralized and career services may be part of another administrative unit. The same is true for other areas such as minority student services, international student services and academic advising.

Respondents were asked to indicate their primary functional area of responsibility. Eighty-nine (40.8%) indicated that Housing/Residence Life was their most time consuming area of responsibility. Thirty-two (14.7%) indicated Career Services as their most time consuming area of responsibility; 11 (5.0%)

indicated Minority Student Programs; ten (4.6%) Student Affairs Division Administration; nine (4.1%) Campus Activities; and eight (3.7%) Academic Advising. Respondents with additional areas of responsibility were also asked to indicate the functional area that was less time consuming than their primary area and the area that was least time consuming. Judicial (discipline) was the area of responsibility mentioned most frequently as the second most consuming functional area by 24 (13.6%) respondents and as least time consuming by 16 (9.7%). Appendix J includes a complete listing of functional areas.

Responses to Supervision Questions

Respondents were asked to rate six questions related to supervision using a Likert-type scale ranging from *Never or Almost Never*, to *Seldom*, to *Sometimes*, to *Often*, to *Always or Almost Always*. Answers to each of the six questions by all respondents are included in Table 7. Given the small number of respondents in many of the categories (Position Title, Race/Ethnicity, Years as a Student Affairs Professional, Gender and Age) as well as groups within the categories, the two possible ratings on the left of the Likert Scale (*Never or Almost Never* and *Seldom*) were combined for analysis. The two possible ratings on the right of the Likert Scale (*Often* and *Always or Almost Always*) were also combined for analysis. This resulted in three ratings for analysis by category: *Never or Almost Never and Seldom*, *Sometimes*, and *Often and Always or Almost Always*.

Responses to each question were then examined by groups within the Position Title, Race/Ethnicity, Years as a Student Affairs Professional, Gender

Table 7

Responses to Questions on Supervision

Survey Questions	Never or Almost Never		Seldom		Sometimes		Often		Always or Almost Always		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1. My supervisor and I develop yearly professional goals that address my strengths and weaknesses.	27	12.3	26	11.9	44	20.1	39	17.8	83	37.9	219	100.0
2. My supervisor and I meet regularly on a pre-determined basis.	13	5.9	24	10.9	33	15.0	55	25.0	95	43.1	220	99.9
3. My supervisor provides me the information I need to do my job and supports my efforts to improve my knowledge, and personal and professional skills.	5	2.3	18	8.2	42	19.2	70	32.0	84	38.4	219	100.1
4. My supervisor and I both contribute when making decisions that affect my area.	3	1.4	15	6.8	38	17.4	73	33.3	90	41.1	219	100.0
5. My supervisor helps me understand how my individual goals contribute to the goals of the division and the institution.	21	9.7	31	14.3	48	22.1	64	29.5	53	24.4	217	100.0
6. My supervisor and I have a level of trust which allows me to give honest feedback, both positive and negative.	10	4.6	18	8.3	30	13.8	52	23.9	108	49.5	218	100.1

and Age categories to determine if responses from each group were higher than or lower than total responses from all survey participants. Responses from some groups within the Position Title category were either higher or lower than total responses in Questions 1, 2, 3 and 6. Responses by one group in the Race/Ethnicity category were higher than other groups and total responses in Question 2. Responses by some groups within the Years as a Student Affairs Professional category were either higher or lower than total responses in Questions 2, 4 and 5. Differences in responses by Gender were found in Question 5. Responses by each group within the Age category were consistent with total responses for each of the six questions. Chi-Square tests were conducted for each of the areas to determine if the differences were statistically significant. Results are discussed in the following sections.

Question 1: My supervisor and I develop yearly professional goals that address my strengths and weaknesses.

One hundred twenty-two (55.7%) respondents indicated *Often and Always* or *Almost Always* to Question 1. Fifty-three (24.2%) indicated *Never or Almost Never and Seldom*. A review of responses by category to total Question 1 responses shows differences only in the category of Position Title. (See Table 8.)

Within the Position Title category, those in the Coordinator group responded *Often and Always or Almost Always* at the highest rate of 65.8%. When the groups of Associate/Assistant Vice-President, Dean and Associate/Assistant Dean are collapsed into one group given there were a total of only 14 respondents in these three positions, those in this new group responded *Often*

Table 8

Responses by Position Title to Question 1: My supervisor and I develop yearly professional goals that address my strengths and weaknesses.

Position Title	Never or Almost Never		Seldom		Sometimes		Often		Always or Almost Always		Total	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Assoc/Asst Vice-President	1	20.0	2	40.0					2	40.0	5	100.0
Dean					2	66.7			1	33.3	3	100.0
Assoc/Asst Dean	2	33.3			2	33.3	1	16.7	1	16.7	6	100.0
Department Head/Director	2	6.3	6	18.8	4	12.5	6	18.8	14	43.8	32	100.2
Assoc/Asst Department Head/Director	8	11.3	8	11.3	11	15.5	14	19.7	30	42.3	71	100.1
Residence Area Coordinator	7	14.6	4	8.3	16	33.3	9	18.8	12	25.0	48	100.0
Coordinator	5	14.3	4	11.4	3	8.6	8	22.9	15	42.9	35	100.1
Other	2	10.5	2	10.5	6	31.6	1	5.3	8	42.1	19	100.0
Total Respondents	27	12.3	26	11.9	44	20.1	39	17.8	83	37.9	219	100.0

and Always or Almost Always at the lowest rate of 35.7%. While these percentages are different than the 55.7% by all respondents, Pearson Chi-Square tests determined the differences are not statistically significant ($p < .05$).

Question 2: My supervisor and I meet regularly on a pre-determined basis.

One hundred fifty (68.1%) respondents indicated *Often and Always or Almost Always* to Question 2. Thirty-seven (16.8%) indicated *Never or Almost Never and Seldom*.

Within the Race/Ethnicity category, respondents who identified themselves as African American indicated *Often and Always or Almost Always* at a rate of 83.9%. This was the highest rate of all racial/ethnic groups and higher than the total response rate of 68.1% but a Pearson Chi-Square test determined the difference is not statistically significant ($p < .05$). (See Table 9.)

Table 9

Responses by Race/Ethnicity to Question 2: My supervisor and I meet regularly on a pre-determined basis.

Race/ Ethnicity	Never or Almost Never		Seldom		Sometimes		Often		Always or Almost Always		Total	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
African American			2	6.5	3	9.7	12	38.7	14	45.2	31	100.1
Asian American/ Pacific Islander			1	50.0					1	50.0	2	100.0
Caucasian/ White American/ Non-Hispanic	12	6.8	18	10.2	29	16.5	39	22.2	78	44.3	176	100.0
Hispanic American			1	25.0			3	75.0			4	100.0
Multicultural/ Biracial			2	40.0	1	20.0	1	20.0	1	20.0	5	100.0
N. American/ Indigenous/Am. Indian/Native Am.	1	50.0							1	50.0	2	100.0
Total Respondents	13	5.9	24	10.9	33	15.0	55	25.0	95	43.1	220	99.9

There were differences in responses to Question 2 depending on the number of years respondents worked as a Student Affairs Professional. (See Table 10.) While all respondents indicated *Often and Always or Almost Always* at a rate of 68.1%, professionals who had been in the field one to three years indicated *Often and Always or Almost Always* at the highest rate of any of the groups in the category at 85.7%. Those in this group represent the newest employees in the field. When the remainder of the categories were collapsed into one category of four or more years as a Student Affairs Professional, respondents indicated *Often and Always or Almost Always* at a rate of 63.9%. A Pearson Chi-Square test determined the difference between the 85.7% response rate of those in the field one to three years and the 63.9% response rate of all others is statistically significant at .25 ($p < .05$).

Table 10

Responses by Years as a Student Affairs Professional to Question 2: My supervisor and I meet regularly on a pre-determined basis.

Years in Profession	Never or Almost Never		Seldom		Sometimes		Often		Always or Almost Always		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1-3 Years			3	7.1	3	7.1	10	23.8	26	61.9	42	99.9
4-6 Years	3	5.7	9	17.0	10	18.9	9	17.0	22	41.5	53	100.1
7-9 Years	2	6.1	2	6.1	4	12.1	9	27.3	16	48.5	33	100.1
10-12 Years	4	13.8	3	10.3	4	13.8	9	31.0	9	31.0	29	99.9
13-15 Years	1	7.1	2	14.3	3	21.4	4	28.6	4	28.6	14	100.0
16-18 Years	1	6.7	1	6.7	2	13.3	4	26.7	7	46.7	15	100.1
19-21 Years			1	9.1	3	27.3	4	36.4	3	27.3	11	100.1
22 or more	2	9.1	3	13.6	4	18.2	5	22.7	8	36.4	22	100.0
Total Respondents	13	5.9	24	10.9	33	15.0	55	25.0	95	43.1	220	99.9

There were also differences in responses to Question 2 depending on the Position Title respondents held. (See Table 11.) A review of responses by Position Title indicates that those in the Residence Area Coordinator group responded *Often and Always or Almost Always* at the highest rate of 81.6% rather than the 68.1% rate by all respondents. A Pearson Chi-Square test

Table 11

Responses by Position Title to Question 2: My supervisor and I meet regularly on a pre-determined basis.

Position Title	Never or Almost Never		Seldom		Sometimes		Often		Always or Almost Always		Total	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Assoc/Asst Vice-President	1	20.0	2	40.0					2	40.0	5	100.0
Dean	1	33.3					1	33.3	1	33.3	3	100.0
Assoc/Asst Dean					1	16.7	2	33.3	3	33.3	6	100.0
Department Head/Director	3	9.1	4	12.1	1	3.1	9	27.3	16	48.5	33	100.1
Assoc/Asst Department Head/Director	5	6.9	8	11.1	16	22.2	22	30.6	21	29.2	72	100.0
Residence Area Coordinator	2	4.1	2	4.1	5	10.2	12	24.5	28	57.1	49	100.0
Coordinator	1	2.9	5	14.3	8	22.9	5	14.2	16	45.7	35	100.0
Other	-	-	3	15.8	3	15.8	4	21.1	9	47.4	19	100.1
Total Respondents	13	5.9	24	10.8	34	15.3	55	24.8	96	43.2	222	100.0

determined the difference between the highest 81.6% response rate and the lowest 68.1% response rate is not statistically significant ($p < .05$).

Question 3: My supervisor provides me the information I need to do my job and supports my efforts to improve my knowledge, and personal and professional goals.

One hundred fifty-five total respondents (70.1%) indicated *Often and Always or Almost Always* as a response to Question 3. Twenty-six (11.8%) responded *Never or Almost Never and Seldom*. A review of responses by category to total Question 3 responses shows differences only in the category of Position Title. (See Table 12.)

Within the Position Title category, those in the Residence Area Coordinator group responded *Often and Always or Almost Always* at the second lowest rate of 59.2%. When the groups of Associate/Assistant Vice-President, Dean and Associate/Assistant Dean are collapsed into one group given there were a total of only 14 respondents in these three positions, those in this group responded *Often and Always or Almost Always* at the lowest rate of any group at 57.1%. While these percentages are different than the 70.1% by all respondents, Pearson Chi-Square tests determined the difference between the lowest rate of 57.1% and the 70.1% rate of total respondents is not statistically significant ($p < .05$).

Question 4: My supervisor and I both contribute when making decisions that affect my area of responsibilities.

Table 12

Responses by Position Title to Question 3: My supervisor provides me the information I need to do my job and supports my efforts to improve my knowledge, and personal and professional goals.

Position Title	Never or Almost Never		Seldom		Sometimes		Often		Always or Almost Always		Total	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Assoc/Asst Vice-President	1	20.0	2	40.0					2	40.0	5	100.0
Dean					1	33.3			2	66.7	3	100.0
Assoc/Asst Dean			1	16.7	1	16.7	1	16.7	3	50.0	6	100.0
Department Head/Director			1	3.0	8	24.2	13	39.4	11	33.3	33	99.9
Assoc/Asst Department Head/Director	2	2.8	4	5.6	10	14.1	23	32.4	32	45.1	71	100.0
Residence Area Coordinator	1	2.0	6	12.2	13	26.5	17	34.7	12	24.5	49	99.9
Coordinator	1	2.9	4	11.4	4	11.4	10	28.6	16	45.7	35	100.0
Other	1	5.3	2	10.5	3	15.8	5	26.3	8	42.1	19	100.0
Total Respondents	6	2.7	20	9.0	40	18.1	69	31.2	86	38.9	221	99.9

One hundred sixty (73.4%) total respondents indicated *Often and Always or Almost Always* as a response to Question 4. Twenty (9.2%) responded *Never or Almost Never and Seldom*. A review of responses by category to total Question 4 responses shows differences only in the category of Years as a Student Affairs Professional. (See Table 13.)

Table 13

Responses by Years as a Student Affairs Professional to Question 4: My supervisor and I both contribute when making decisions that affect my area of responsibility.

Years in Profession	Never or Almost Never		Seldom		Sometimes		Often		Always or Almost Always		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1-3 Years	1	2.4			6	14.3	18	42.9	17	40.5	42	100.1
4-6 Years	1	1.9	6	11.3	9	17.0	20	37.7	17	32.1	53	100.0
7-9 Years	1	3.0	3	9.1	5	15.2	12	36.4	12	36.4	33	100.1
10-12 Years			4	14.3	5	17.9	7	25.0	12	42.9	28	100.1
13-15 Years			1	7.1	4	28.6	3	21.4	6	42.9	14	100.0
16-18 Years	1	6.7	1	6.7	2	13.3	4	26.7	7	46.7	15	100.1
19-21 Years					3	27.3	3	27.3	5	45.5	11	100.1
22 or more			1	4.5	4	18.2	8	36.4	9	40.9	22	100.0
Total Respondents	4	1.8	16	7.3	38	17.4	75	34.4	85	39.0	218	99.9

Note. One respondent to Question 4 did not indicate years worked as Student Affairs Professional.

Within the Years as a Student Affairs Profession category, those in the one to three years group responded *Often and Always or Almost Always* at the highest rate of 83.3%. While these percentages are higher than the 73.4% by all respondents, Pearson Chi-Square tests determined the differences are not statistically significant ($p < .05$).

Question 5: "My supervisor helps me understand how my individual goals contribute to the goals of the division and the institution."

One hundred seventeen (53.9%) total respondents indicated *Often and Always or Almost Always* as a response to Question 5. Fifty-two (24.0%) responded *Never or Almost Never and Seldom*. A review of responses by

category to total Question 5 responses shows differences in the Gender (Table 14) and Years as a Student Affairs Professional (Table 15) categories.

Table 14

Responses by Gender to Question 5: My supervisor helps me understand how my individual goals contribute to the goals of the division and the institution.

Gender	Never or Almost Never		Seldom		Sometimes		Often		Always or Almost Always		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Females	13	9.6	16	11.8	25	18.4	41	30.1	41	30.1	136	100.0
Males	8	10.1	15	19.0	22	27.8	22	27.9	12	15.2	79	100.0
Total Respondents	21	9.7	31	14.3	48	22.1	64	29.5	53	24.4	217	100.0

Note. Two respondents to Question 5 did not indicate gender.

Table 15

Responses by Years as Student Affairs Professional to Question 5: My supervisor helps me understand how my individual goals contribute to the goals of the division and the institution.

Years in Profession	Never or Almost Never		Seldom		Sometimes		Often		Always or Almost Always		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1-3 Years	4	9.5	7	16.7	7	16.7	13	31.0	11	26.2	42	100.1
4-6 Years	5	9.6	9	17.3	12	23.1	13	25.0	13	25.0	52	100.0
7-9 Years	4	12.1	4	12.1	9	27.3	12	36.4	4	12.1	33	100.0
10-12 Years	4	14.3	6	21.4	7	25.0	5	17.9	6	21.4	28	100.0
13-15 Years	2	14.3	2	14.3	2	14.3	6	42.9	2	14.3	14	100.1
16-18 or More			1	6.7	2	13.3	5	33.3	7	46.7	15	100.0
19-21 Years					4	40.0	3	30.0	3	30.0	10	100.0
22 or more	2	9.1	1	4.5	4	18.2	7	31.8	8	36.4	22	100.0
Total Respondents	21	9.7	30	13.9	47	21.8	64	29.6	54	25.0	216	100.0

Responses to all questions from males and females were similar to each other and to total responses with the exception of Question 5. Within the Gender category, females selected *Often and Always or Almost Always* at a rate of 60.2% and males at a rate of 43.0%. While 53.9% of all respondents selected one of these responses, Pearson Chi-Square tests determined the difference between the higher responses by females and the lower responses by males is not statistically significant ($p < .05$).

Within the Years as a Student Affairs Professional category, those who had worked 10 to 12 years as a Student Affairs Professional responded to *Often and Always or Almost Always* at the lowest rate of 39.3% and those who had worked for 16 to 18 years responded at the highest rate at 80.0%. While all respondents indicated *Often and Always or Almost Always* at a 54.6%, Pearson Chi-Square tests determined the difference between the higher responses of those in the profession 16 to 18 years and the lower responses of those in the profession 10 to 12 years is not statistically significant ($p < .05$).

Question 6: My supervisor and I have a level of trust which allows me to give honest feedback, both positive and negative.

One hundred sixty (72.3%) total respondents indicated *Often and Always or Almost Always* as a response to Question 6. Thirty (13.6%) responded *Never or Almost Never and Seldom*. A review of responses by category to total Question 6 responses shows differences only in the category of Position Title. (See Table 16.)

Table 16

Responses by Position Title to Question 6: My supervisor and I have a level of trust, which allows me to give honest feedback, both positive and negative.

Position Title	Never or Almost Never		Seldom		Sometimes		Often		Always or Almost Always		Total	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Assoc/Asst Vice-President			1	25.0					3	75.0	4	100.0
Dean					1	33.3			2	66.7	3	100.0
Assoc/Asst Dean	1	16.7					1	16.7	4	66.7	6	100.0
Department Head/Director			1	3.0	5	15.2	7	21.2	20	60.6	33	100.0
Assoc/Asst Department Head/Director	2	2.8	5	6.9	9	12.5	19	26.4	37	51.4	72	100.0
Residence Area Coordinator	5	10.2	4	8.2	10	20.4	12	24.5	18	36.7	49	100.0
Coordinator	3	8.8	6	17.6	3	8.8	5	14.7	17	50.0	34	99.9
Other			2	10.5	2	10.5	8	42.1	7	36.8	19	99.9
Total Respondents	11	5.0	19	8.6	30	13.6	52	23.6	108	49.1	220	99.9

Within the Position Title category, those in the Department Head/Director group responded *Often and Always or Almost Always* at the highest rate of 81.8% and those in the Resident Area Coordinator group at the lowest rate of 61.2%. While the percentage reported by those in the Department Head/Director group is higher and the percentage reported by those in the Resident Area

Coordinator group is lower than the 72.3% by all respondents, Pearson Chi-Square tests determined the differences are not statistically significant ($p < .05$).

Persistence in the Profession

The number of years a practitioner remains in the student affairs profession is one indicator of persistence. Survey respondents were asked to select one of eight ranges representing the number of years they have worked in student affairs as a professional. I wanted to know if there was any relationship between the length of time practitioners had spent in the profession and their perceptions of synergistic supervision received. Correlational research is helpful in determining not only if a relationship exists between two variables, but also the extent of any relationship. Given the large quantity of data and the use of a five-point scale in the survey, scatterplots were not helpful in identifying outliers or determining a relationship between the variables. Responses to each of the six survey questions were analyzed using Pearson correlation coefficients and Spearman rho, with an alpha of .05 and two-tailed tests of significance.

Analyses demonstrated there are no statistically significant differences in responses to survey questions by any of the ranges of *Years Worked as Student Affairs Professional* with the following exception. Responses to *Question 2: My supervisor and I meet regularly on a pre-determined basis* indicate a small negative relationship between years worked in the profession and regular meetings with a supervisor, with an r of $-.128$ and a rho of $-.164$. (See Table 17.)

Further examination of Question 2 reveals that career stage bias may be built into this question. In the student affairs profession, as in many other fields,

Table 17

Correlations of Years as a Student Affairs Professional with Responses to Survey Questions.

	<i>n</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>	Rho	<i>p</i>
Question 1	218	.043	.528	.018	.787
Question 2	219	-.128*	.058	-.164*	.015
Question 3	218	.023	.737	.018	.788
Question 4	219	.069	.310	.052	.447
Question 5	216	.110	.105	.071	.296
Question 6	217	.074	.275	.060	.378

*Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).

supervisors typically meet with new employees more often than they meet with more seasoned professionals. It therefore follows that the newest employees (those with one to three years in the profession) would report they meet regularly with their supervisors on a pre-determined basis at a higher rate than other employees. When Question 2 is eliminated from the analysis, examination of responses to the other five questions shows that there is no negative correlation between the Years Worked as Student Affairs Professional category and responses to the survey questions. (See Table 18.)

Table 18

Correlations of Years as a Student Affairs Profession with Responses to Survey Questions 1, 3-6

	<i>n</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>	Rho	<i>p</i>
Responses to Survey Questions 1, 3, 4, 5, 6	213	.101	.142	.075	.280

Commitment to the Profession.

Membership in professional organizations has been identified as one indicator of a commitment to the student affairs profession. Survey respondents were asked to list national and regional/state professional organizations in which they held membership. Using *t*-tests, the means of responses to survey questions by those indicating membership in national organizations were compared to the means of responses of those who did not list any memberships. At an alpha level of .05 there are no statistically significant differences. The means of responses to survey questions by those indicating membership in regional/state organizations were compared to the means of responses of those who did not list any memberships using *t*-tests. At an alpha of .05 there are no statistically significant differences.

Summary of Quantitative Data

Data for the quantitative section of this study were analyzed for 237 student affairs professionals, representing a 45.1% response rate, who completed the online survey consisting of six questions related to perceptions of supervision received. For each of the six questions, more respondents answered *Often and Always or Almost Always* than *Never or Almost Never and Seldom*. Responses to each question were examined to determine if there were differences in responses by groups within the categories of Position Title, Race/Ethnicity, Years as a Student Affairs Professional, Gender and Age. While differences in responses to questions by groups were found, only responses to

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Question 2: My supervisor and I meet regularly on a pre-determined basis were determined to be statistically significant. Pearson Chi-Square tests determined the responses by those working one to three years as Student Affairs Professionals to Question 2 were statistically significantly different than responses given by other groups in the category and by total respondents. Additionally, Pearson correlation coefficients and Spearman rho indicated a small negative relationship between years worked in the profession and regular meetings with a supervisor. However, when Question 2 was eliminated from analysis because of possible built-in career stage bias, no negative relationship was evident between the Years Worked as Student Affairs Professional category and responses to survey questions.

Responses to survey questions were also examined for differences by respondents' affiliation with professional organizations. In examining responses by those who indicated membership in national and regional/state professional organizations and those who did not indicate membership in professional organizations, *t*-tests determined there were no statistically significant differences in responses.

Qualitative Data Collection and Responses

Data for the qualitative portion of this study were collected through face-to-face interviews. Interview participants were purposefully selected from student affairs professionals with at least five to ten years of experience in the profession employed by public Michigan universities. I asked my colleagues working in the areas of Career Services, Housing and Residential Life, and Student Life to

provide several names of their colleagues working at public Michigan universities. I contacted student affairs professionals working in each of these three areas from the list of names provided and requested interviews.

Participants were selected for interviews based on their availability and while they were in the pool of potential participants for the online survey it is unknown if they completed the survey. A face-to-face interview lasting approximately one hour was conducted with each of nine participants at their work sites.

Three of the interview participants held the job title of Department Director, two were Associate Directors, two Assistant Directors, one Assistant Manager and one held the title of Coordinator. One of the participants held a doctorate, seven held master's degrees, and one was currently working on a master's degree. Two of the participants were African American males, three were Caucasian males, and four Caucasian females. Six of the participants were working at the institution where they earned their undergraduate degrees and two of the six had not worked at any other higher education institution.

Pseudonyms are used for the actual participants. Larry is in his early thirties and working at the same institution where he earned his undergraduate degree. He earned his master's at an out-of-state institution and took his first professional position at an institution in a third state. He was recruited by a former supervisor to apply for a position at his undergraduate institution where he has now been five years. He plans on earning his doctorate with the goal of becoming a senior student affairs administrator.

Laura is working at the institution where she earned her bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees. There have been times over her twenty years of professional work when she considered working at a different higher education institution but the opportunities she has been given at what she considers her "home" institution have kept her there. She has worked in several different student services areas providing direct services to students and expects to end her career in about five years by retiring.

Donna was a nontraditional married student with children who started her undergraduate degree in her early thirties at an out-of-state institution. She has spent eight years at her current institution working in two different areas and receiving several promotions. She is completing her master's degree but does not want to move up through the administrative ranks where she believes she would become too disconnected from students.

Greg is working at the institution where he earned his undergraduate degree. After graduating, he lived out-of-state for a short time then returned to his undergraduate institution where he earned his master's and has now worked for 25 years. He has held a number of progressively more responsible positions in the same functional area. Although at one time, before he married, he considered moving to another institution, he now anticipates finishing his career at his current institution because of his love of his job and his family.

Tom is also working at his undergraduate institution, spending most of the last 20 years in various student affairs positions. He earned his master's degree at his employing institution as well. At one point he took a position in a different

area of the university for a couple of years but found the required travel was not conducive to his family life and that he missed the work with students. An opportunity arose to return to student affairs and he has been in his current position for five years. Although he does not want to spend the rest of his career in his current position he plans to stay at the institution and continue to live in the community where he and his family are closely connected to school, church and friends.

Jean completed both her bachelor's and master's at institutions on the east coast. She has spent 25 years working in student affairs but feels it was something she fell into by accident. She took her first position working at a college because she needed a job. She found she liked the work and was given more responsibility. This led to her acceptance of a position with more responsibility at another institution in the same state. She has held her current director position 13 years at her Michigan institution. Although she is considering retiring in a few years and possibly will open a business she plans on remaining in the area she now considers her home.

Ron completed both his undergraduate and master's degrees at his current institution. He spent three years in his first professional position at an out-of-state institution, followed by a few years at another institution in the same state. He returned to Michigan for a position with more responsibility in a different functional area and stayed there about two years. An unexpected opportunity came up at his undergraduate institution and even though it meant uprooting his family, he accepted the position and returned to what he considers "home". He

has held his current position for six years. He knows he can not advance further at his institution without a terminal degree. At this time he does not plan on earning a doctorate and has not decided whether he will leave the institution and remain in the community that is important to him and his family, or if he will take a position with another institution.

Paul has been at his current institution for seven years. During that time he held three different positions in two different functional areas, advancing within the organization to his current director's position. He previously worked one year at an institution in the south, earned his master's at an institution in another state and his bachelor's at an institution in the east. He loves his challenging work at his current institution and plans to stay until he feels he has accomplished all he can and it is time for the next person to take over. In his early thirties, he also feels pressure related to making "family type decisions" and knows he may have to relocate at some point to maintain his long distance relationship.

Lisa is the mother of college-aged children who has been at her current institution, where she earned her bachelor's and master's degrees, for eight years. Prior to her current position, Lisa worked as a teacher and then in a professional educational setting providing services to students. Her master's thesis actually helped her make the transition from some human resources related work to her current position. She has no desire to earn a terminal degree and plans on staying at her current institution as long as she continues to have the freedom to take on new projects and is challenged.

As the interview transcripts and field notes were analyzed, four discernable themes and patterns emerged related to the interview participants' experiences as student affairs professionals and as supervisors. The remainder of this chapter is devoted to a discussion of those themes and patterns. The themes and patterns include (a) mentoring, (b) balance, (c) focus on students, and (d) creating opportunities.

Mentoring.

Each of the interview participants made reference to a mentor or mentoring during the course of the interview. When interview participants talked about mentors, the mentor was usually mentioned by name with a brief description of how that person played the role of mentor. Mentors recognized the potential of the interview participants and provided encouragement, support and motivation. This positive experience prepared interview participants to take on the role of mentor to others as they progressed through their careers. A mentor was often, although not always, a supervisor. Larry mentioned two mentors by name who influenced him in his undergraduate career by encouraging him to become an RA (Resident Assistant) in housing and to continue on to graduate school, where he received further mentoring. His first Dean of Students at his undergraduate institution recognized him and "planted the seed" by asking him if he had thought about going into student affairs; if he had thought about graduate school. Larry believes the mentoring he received was "...very crucial as far as keeping me motivated and keeping my perspectives fresh as far as student affairs is concerned". Laura felt she was lucky to have many mentors, not just

one. According to Laura, “I never necessarily went officially looking for mentors but I seemed to have people who cared for me and that I’ve really respected”. She continued to receive mentoring in her graduate programs and professional career from both faculty and colleagues and believes she would not have stayed in her doctoral program without the support of mentors.

In her first position at her current institution, Donna worked for a director who saw potential in her. As her mentor, the director encouraged Donna to stretch and go beyond what she normally would have done. Much of her style in working with students was learned by watching another mentor “masterfully work with students”. Tom holds a great amount of respect for one of his early mentors, who is now a colleague. He continues to be not only Tom’s mentor but also his friend. They live near each other, their families spend time together and continue to have many conversations about professional goals and support one another. Jean believes she gravitated toward people who wanted to mentor her and she would not be where she is if it had not been for the dean of students at the college where she worked earlier. She explains that one of the most important things he did for her was to give her confidence.

One of Ron’s early mentors is the person he credits with encouraging him to go to graduate school and enter student affairs. More than ten years later, he even credits that mentor with leading him to the position he currently holds. Another early mentor has influenced his thinking even today. One of the principles that was important to her and has stuck with Ron is that “...everyone deserves to be treated with dignity and self-worth”. Ron reports “that’s a phrase

that I saw over and over with her and I thought those are things to aspire to in life in general". Paul recalls an early mentor who used Paul's interest in sports to connect him to student affairs through recreation and intramural sports. Paul considers him to still be his mentor to this day "...in regards to really keeping me focused on something I love to do".

Not only was receiving mentoring important to the interview participants, several also stressed the significance of opportunities presented to them to become mentors to others. One of the things Larry said keeps him in the profession is "mentoring professionals and seeing their energy continue on". Laura credits the mentoring she received with contributing to her success and believes "I probably replicate some of the things that people did for me" with her staff. She sees herself as "...helping to be a guide, helping my staff figure out the university and why people do the things they do". One of her points of pride is that graduate assistants and staff she has trained do well as they interview for other positions, giving her feedback that what they learned from her was valuable, and that they still look to her for advice. Donna describes her mentoring role as one which includes a "...lot of teaching time, one on one time, displaying and demonstrating what I expect, what I want to see". Jean acknowledges that she will not be a mentor to all the staff she supervises. While she does not see herself as a mentor to some older staff she inherited, she has found mentoring opportunities with younger staff members by helping them develop and achieve their career goals. Paul mentors his staff by modeling behavior he expects from them, including how he works with students. Lisa works with each of her staff to

identify their skills and areas of expertise and "...pays attention to what someone considers important". She then works with each individual to give them opportunities to develop their areas of interest so that it benefits the work everyone does in the department.

Several participants mentioned nurturing as a part of what they do as mentors. Larry states that one of the things that keeps him in the profession is being able to nurture the "energy, love, and passion" for students he sees in staff. He sees his role working with professional and student staff as "...help[ing] nurture them as professionals or future professionals or as growing professionals as far as student affairs" is concerned. Greg believes one way he can help new staff find their place in the profession is by "nurturing their desires, following up on their goals, and your own goals." He sees his role as a supervisor to his staff as "nurturing, encouraging, giving them opportunities." Jean does not see all new professionals with a commitment to the profession but believes it is "something you need to feed, and can nurture."

The mentoring role becomes significant with students as well. Jean benefited from mentoring, believes it is important, and finds mentoring opportunities not just with younger staff but with also with students. She discovered she liked mentorship through her role as a mother. While Lisa did not identify a mentor who sparked her interest in entering the student affairs profession, she became excited about mentoring and incorporated it into the progressive career ladder she developed through her master's thesis and implemented in her work.

Balance.

With the exception of Laura and Lisa, the participants believed working in Student Affairs provided them opportunities to balance a professional life with a personal life. Laura shared that at times during her career, her passion for working in student affairs and making a difference in students' lives was so primary that she did not take care of herself. She has seen student affairs professionals "...put up with adverse working conditions", suffer long work hours and experience few opportunities for promotions and salary increases due to their commitment and passion for working with students. Lisa believes student affairs work makes balancing a personal and professional life difficult, observing that "it's common to work long hours and furthering your own formal education may be possible for some but not for most in student affairs." She has seen colleagues who were unable to complete a doctoral program because of work commitments. Lisa also believes it may be different depending on the type of work. She sees those doing residence life work as having less balance than others in student affairs but that in general, it is common, and at times even the expectation, that everyone works 50 to 60 hours each week during the academic year so balancing a personal and professional life is difficult.

Tom also thinks it may be more of a challenge for professionals working in housing to find balance than for those working in student activities because they are required to live on site, but making time for activities not related to work can

be difficult for everyone. He tries to be a role model for staff and finds at times he needs to just “kick people out” of the office and send them home. However, Tom recognizes that the student affairs profession can also provide opportunities for balance between the personal and the professional aspects of life. For example, his job allows him the flexibility and “if I need to run down to the school for some function I can” so he doesn’t miss his children’s events.

Jean believes that a flexible work schedule is an advantage of working in student affairs, especially if you have children. She helps her staff find balance between their personal and professional lives and says “I insist they don’t work too much and I watch. I have two [staff] who would do it”. If she sees they are working too much, she will encourage them to take some time for themselves. She also tries to be aware of her own work schedule and takes time off when she needs it. Ron thinks that it is hard for new professionals to find balance but that everybody defines balance differently and it is not always “dualistic, either/or”. If you are in student affairs for the “right reasons” finding balance “...won’t be as much of a challenge or issue”. Ron states there really is no such thing as a 40 hour work week and some people can work 60 or 70 hours a week and still have great balance. He believes you have to look for signs and if you are not keeping your commitments to others and to yourself, you are not in balance. He mentioned a former supervisor as a good example of someone who did not have balance and was a workaholic. Ron says “I am not one of the people who wears that value with pride. I work hard, but I work hard to get work done in the office so I’m not taking it home”.

Paul feels that balance in student affairs is difficult depending on family and other responsibilities so he tries to model expectations for his staff. He encourages staff to take time away from work, to take a break, and to challenge themselves. He and his staff often socialize outside of work but take care to talk about anything but work. Greg also tries to role model finding a true balance for young staff as they move “up the ladder” in the profession. Larry believes that someone who is committed to the profession not only supports professional development but also encourages “balance and taking time for yourself.” As he says, “you have to remind them of staying focused, take a break, reminding them of that balance, so they can stay energized.

While most participants believed the student affairs profession allowed one the ability to balance a personal and professional life, at times doing so required a concerted effort. For some, getting married and starting a family provided the incentive to focus more on a personal life. Both Tom and Paul noted that staff who are not married tend to focus primarily on work, often at the expense of a personal life. Tom jokingly says the best way to find balance is to “...get married and have kids”. He finds that staff who are not married and do not have family commitments tend to spend too much time in the office and “live” there. Paul acknowledges that if his girlfriend lived in the local area, his colleagues would not see him spend as much time at work. Larry makes a concerted effort to maintain contact with old friends who do not work in student affairs or higher education and have conversations about topics that are totally

unrelated to his work. He believes connecting with friends outside the profession helps him "...find out what's going on in the world".

Focus on Students.

During the interviews participants frequently returned to the importance of students in the work they do and the opportunities they had to make a difference in the lives of students. Larry emphasized the focus on students when he stated:

I've always been told if I ever get bored or if I ever lose sight of why I'm really in the profession, then it's time to change jobs. So if I ever forget about the students or if I lose sight about the students and students aren't my priority, there's no reason for me to be here.

Donna was succinct in her description of her motivation and reason for doing what she does as: "the students". Lisa appreciates that the student affairs profession values "...everything you do, you do with students, you engage them in the learning."

Jean thinks people are in the student affairs profession because "...they believe they can make a difference too and that's important and [they] encourage students to make a difference in their lives." Ron finds his motivation for being in student affairs from the "...opportunity to contribute and make a difference in the lives of students." He continues by saying his staff do not work for him, they work for the students. Paul echoes this sentiment by saying "...it's not about self, it's about the students." One of the things Greg loves about working in student affairs is the interaction with students. "It's fun with students, exciting to see them as freshmen, see them as seniors and graduate students as they move on."

Tom has held positions in several areas at his university but loves his role in student life because the contact with students allows him to be himself and have fun. Tom likes to make fun of himself and says, "I'm really not a mature person. I'm really an idiot most of the time." He may want to move to a different position at his institution but he does not "...want to have to be a stuffed shirt sitting with vice-presidents. Let me take the trash out on welcome day. I'm okay with that."

Success may be defined by the number of former students who go on to work as student affairs professionals or simply by students going on to lead successful lives, regardless of the profession they choose. Donna was one of several participants who defined their own success as being tied to student success and said, "I've had three of my student employees go on to student affairs positions...". But she also feels she has had success with another student who graduated and accepted a position out of state that was not in student affairs. When students she worked with found success in life, Donna felt she had succeeded. As Paul explained, "It's about students being successful in whatever career they've chosen." Laura stated, "students and the needs my students had, their successes, kept me in it. I am so internally motivated by my students succeeding. It's like feeding a junkie." Larry knows he has been successful when former students stay in touch and let him know they appreciate what he did for them. He knows he has had an impact on their lives when they invite him to weddings, write him letters or call him and when they continue to call him for

advice on a particular issue. He describes “having those moments when you least expect it” as one of the rewards for the work he does.

As did several other participants, Donna gave an example of a student she had worked with who was struggling. As she learned more about his background and the obstacles he faced and overcame, she realized his potential and helped him recognize it as well. She ended up hiring him as a student worker and connecting him to a professor, which led to an internship. “I was able to see him blossom... and [he was] so excited that somebody cared.” She also learned that he grew up in foster homes and no one had ever come to one of his graduations. She told him she would attend his graduation and see him receive his master’s degree. Donna reflected, “to watch this 6 foot tall, 230 pound, African-American young man cry because nobody in his life has ever done that – it makes it worth it.”

Several participants kept tangible indicators of their connections with students or the importance of student success. Jean and Ron both keep thank you cards and notes they receive from students in a desk drawer. Ron keeps two awards on a bookcase in his office that are special to him because they came from students. Paul showed me a poster he keeps in his office that was made by a student. The student interviewed him for a class assignment and then created a poster with symbols and notes reflecting Paul’s leadership style and characteristics.

The focus placed on students by these student affairs professionals is a constant reminder of why they do the work they do. Students are the priority and

student success is important. These student affairs professionals make connections with students which often continue long after they graduate. The tangible indicators from students they keep at hand serve as symbolic reminders of why they do the work they do and provides continued motivation to continue their work.

Creating Opportunities.

Most participants believed it was important to create opportunities to grow professionally for staff who reported to them. Professional growth could mean developing skills that enable one to be more effective in a current position. Competent student affairs professionals possess skills in leadership and administration, interpersonal communication, critical thinking, and problem solving. These skills could be developed by serving on institutional committees, teaching, and even coaching. Professional growth could also mean gaining the experiences necessary for promotion. Promotion may mean moving up within the current organization or leaving for an advanced position at another higher education institution. Participants shared many examples of how opportunities had been created for them early in their careers and they wanted to do the same for others. Creating opportunities often became a collaborative or team effort.

At times, creating opportunities meant opening doors for someone: at other times, it meant giving them a little push. Larry created opportunities by helping staff develop a professional development plan from “day one”, as soon as they started the job. He believed that “getting them involved in committees, taking classes, going to conferences, providing those opportunities to develop

those skills keeps them interested in the profession and in their own growth and development". Laura tried to "...create opportunities for people to shine". She understood the impact this could have on professional development as she reflected on her own experience. Her participation on a panel with senior university administrators led to a joint appointment between student and academic affairs which provided her an opportunity to not only use her skills but to develop new ones. She expressed concern that attention to the careers of colleagues was often lost and believed "we need to also turn our talents to make sure others grow in their profession".

Donna grooms staff members so they can take advantage of opportunities to move up in the profession, even though it would be hard to lose them as her employees. Greg "...likes to open doors and give opportunities for [them] to work in other areas, other parts of the university". He sees communicating with staff and creating opportunities as part of team building. Greg also believes in "...talking about what the next step is and ...giving them that little shove so they can move on." Jean thinks if you "know your strengths and test it out, there are many opportunities in student services." Paul encourages his staff to develop each other and their life skills. If they want to move up in the profession, he will help provide them experiences, encouragement and opportunities. If his employees are not interested in moving up, he will not push them, but he will challenge them to continue to grow professionally.

Some participants described creating opportunities for staff who report to them in terms of helping people find their niche. Laura emphasized this as one of

her goals. Greg felt it was especially important to “help them [staff] find their niche if they’re not sure where they’re headed” in their careers. Lisa believed that there is a niche within 10 to 20 percent of every job. That 10 to 20 percent is the part of the job that an employee really enjoys or excels at, and responding to that niche allows you to stretch people a bit and create opportunities for growth. The advice Jean would give to new professionals is to tell them to “seek out their niche.” She recommended trying out the many opportunities in student affairs and “...know your strengths and test it out.” Helping staff find a place where they can grow was not limited to opportunities on campus. For example, Paul believed staff also have “their own little niche” in regards to the professional associations in which they choose to become involved. In his experience, people think and talk differently in different associations so Paul encouraged his staff to find one that suits them.

Interview participants supported professional growth for staff who reported to them and helped create opportunities for growth. Often they created opportunities for staff which resulted in them moving to other positions or even other institutions, but they still believed it was what they should be doing as supervisors. Even though hiring and training new staff requires supervisors’ time and resources, interview participants were supportive of staff who wanted to move on and were committed to continue creating opportunities for them.

Persistence in the Profession

Interview participants acknowledged that high turnover and a lack of persistence in the student affairs profession can be an issue. However, turnover

can be defined in more than one way. If an employee leaves student affairs for a position outside higher education, they have not persisted in the profession. If employees leave their institutions for positions in student affairs at other higher education institutions, they have persisted in the student affairs profession. Their persistence in the profession may be due to the support they received from their supervisors for their professional growth and development. While persistence in the profession can be seen in a positive light, the department and institution the employee has left may be more concerned with the immediate issue of filling the vacancy created by that departure than the fact the employee persists in the profession. This is not an unreasonable response given that filling vacant positions requires financial and staff resources. There is often a learning curve, which may last several months as a new employee learns the position, contributing to an additional loss of productivity.

Participants in the interviews for this study demonstrated support of the career goals of staff who reported to them, regardless of whether that would lead them to student affairs positions outside their current university or if they planned on staying where they were. They believed the benefits to the profession and to the individual outweighed the negative consequences involved in replacing staff. Jean talks to her staff about their professional goals on a regular basis. If a staff member is interested in advancing in the profession and needs to leave her department or the institution to do so, she is supportive of them. She says "I lost an excellent staff person because he wanted to move to the next level". She believed it was important to support him in meeting his goals even though it

meant he moved to another institution. For those interested in staying in their same positions, she helps them find fulfillment in other things, even if those things are outside of work. The challenge she presents and the conversations she has are different for each employee depending on how they feel rewarded.

Greg emphasizes communication about professional goals, especially with new employees. He will do an assessment and "...try to get a feel for what they are interested in" and what direction they want their career to take. He will then help them follow up on their goals. Tom has had the same staff for five years and states, "one of my personal goals is to push one or two of them out, not because they're not doing the job or they're not great people but because it's time." He believes the fact his staff has stayed constant is because "it reflects on them, the fact that they are challenged and the type of supervisor they have." He does not believe it is because he does all the right things as a supervisor but he listens to them and gives them opportunities for fulfillment and to reach their career goals whether they stay in their current positions or advance to others.

Larry helps his staff put together a professional development plan and has "...conversations with them about where they want to go, what they want to do and nurture that along the way." He wants them to walk away feeling not only that they had an experience that was rewarding, but they also "...had the opportunity to make the experience what it was themselves so they have investment and autonomy in that". Laura sees her role as a guide by "helping my staff figure out the university and why people do the things they do." She and her

staff set personal goals for the year. She then sets benchmarks for each individual, a process she believes helps reduce attrition.

Ron wants his staff to know what their internal motivation is and suggests they:

have to look for things to help feed that. Sometimes that means moving up and moving on to another job. Sometimes it means changing the way you do your job now. Sometimes that will mean working with different people, sometimes that will mean taking on a different project.

He advises staff to look at what is missing from their current experience and to fill in the gaps. "If you approach things from that mind set things that come your way and present you with opportunities."

In her commitment to staff development, Lisa explains:

Some people operate that they have the fear if they train someone, they will leave. Our other option is to not train them and keep them! I would rather try and develop people and lose them, because I like that. I see their confidence and competence is up and that's what being an educator is about.

She considers her style of supervision to be one of developing people and pays attention to what people consider important. She recognizes that not everyone has the same needs and will respond to different intrinsic rewards. Her role is to help staff identify those needs and develop ways to fulfill them.

While participants are supportive when staff decide to leave, they still make efforts to maintain a high level of satisfaction among their employees.

Donna thinks it is important to give employees a sense of self-worth. “You have to show them that what they’re doing is very important. And that where they’re at, they’re valuable, they matter, they count.” She tries to show staff that she values them in very tangible ways. She feels many of those ways are very small and sometimes silly, but she makes an effort to acknowledge the work of her staff, give them credit for their ideas and show them she appreciates the things they do. She may give them a card, or bring donuts to a meeting, or invite them to her house for a cookout. She believes that through these efforts and letting them know their input is as important as hers that she is building a team spirit that will help her staff feel good about the work they do.

Paul considers turnover at his institution an important issue that needs to be addressed. He feels constant turnover will begin to affect the quality of services his office can provide to students. His area of student life is understaffed so everyone is doing more than one job. He says, “I would love to bring in other people and maybe the turnover wouldn’t be so high. People are doing more than they were originally hired for”. He does what he can to keep his staff by pointing out how they are developing their skills and talents through the extra work they do. Paul also gives them credit for their work and shows his appreciation in various ways since he can not compensate them monetarily. Even though he can see the effects of high turnover, he is still supportive when staff feel they need to leave to advance in their career.

Commitment to the Profession

Most participants felt that a commitment to the student affairs profession was demonstrated by membership and involvement in professional organizations and following guidelines for practice spelled out by these organizations. Guiding principles established by professional organizations provide a basis for consistent delivery of quality services to students. Jean encourages her staff to get involved in professional associations right away, work into leadership positions, and take advantage of networking opportunities. For Greg, demonstrating a commitment to the profession is encountered on several fronts “through professional organizations, presentations, and what you do within the system [on campus].” An expectation he has for his staff is that they will become involved in a professional organization and “...take the lead in some things”.

Paul and Jean both see involvement in professional organizations and the opportunities for networking as especially beneficial for new staff. Paul says, “they’re great for young professionals. Great place to network, get your feet wet.” His opinion is based on his own experience, in that he can still pick up the phone and call colleagues he met through networking at conferences years ago.

Some look to professional organizations such as NASPA and ACPA to guide their practice or profession. Ron refers to the Guidelines/Principles of Good Practice provided through NASPA and ACPA as one of the basic pieces that guides him and helps him guide his staff. Donna finds that the Code of Ethics through her professional association helps in her work with facilities. She also points to the nine guiding principles that her division of student affairs adheres to

as an "...extra added component that students' needs are looked at". They share these guidelines and principles with their staffs.

Interview participants found ways to take advantage of the resources provided by professional organizations. In addition to attending conferences, reading professional journals, reports and publications; participating in list serves and discussion lists are some of the ways that student affairs professionals can keep current and fresh, according to Larry and Tom. Larry views professional organizations as providing opportunities for him to present at conferences, serve on committees, and submit articles for publication. He has been encouraged by his supervisors to:

Stay actively involved in regional and national organizations as well as getting trained in different institutes such as the crises management institute to help develop my skills and help me as far as what I want to do and where I'm going.

Laura took advantage of opportunities offered by professional associations by testing some of her team building skills. This helped further her own professional development by gaining experience in organizational leadership which eventually enabled her to become founding president of an organization.

While interview participants believed that involvement in professional organizations was one aspect of a demonstrated commitment to the student affairs profession, along with other methods of skill development that make someone administratively sound, it was not necessarily the defining issue related to commitment to the profession. Laura believes commitment to the profession is

based in “our passion for human development which I think has guided my personal life and career decisions” and that “most of us who choose student affairs [do so] because we have a passion for it”.

In describing someone who is committed to the profession, Larry says: You can see not only in their energy and excitement but their love and passion for the job and that’s shown through how they supervise professional staff and how they interact with students and how they put students first on a lot of levels as much as they can.

Larry believes the energy, excitement and passion he experiences in interacting with students also shows in how he supervises staff. He takes pride in “seeing the energy, that love, that passion for students and seeing it develop along the way” in his staff. Ron is not only passionate about his beliefs but also reflects that, “I developed my passion for student affairs from my own experiences as a student with student affairs professionals.” Paul models behavior he expects from his staff that he believes demonstrates his commitment to the profession by focusing on students’ needs, not his own. “Number one, it’s not about self. It’s about the students, seeing them through the good and the bad times, the development that comes, become leaders in their chosen profession.” Paul believes the behavior he has modeled and the fact that his staff sees the “passion I have” has helped them “to keep having passion and really stay committed.”

Donna also believes one way she helps new professionals develop commitment is by demonstrating how she handles situations. Her staff can see

how she always puts the needs of students at the forefront. Donna states the number one thing for committed professionals is "...the realization that students are valuable people. That the student is an individual and [we should] have respect and give that person dignity, as an individual person no matter what their individual choices, no matter what their background." She goes on to say, "they're not just dispensable people who come and go. They're valuable individuals. That's one of the core things that a student affairs professional really has to grab on to". Ron echoes this value that "...everyone deserves to be treated with dignity and self-worth." He believes that while some professionals are more committed to the profession and others are more committed to the institution for which they work, he does not believe that those two commitments have to be mutually exclusive. Ron sees his commitment to student affairs as a commitment to teaching and learning with students.

Tom describes someone committed to the student affairs profession by saying, "to me, it's someone who has to enjoy and thrive on the energy that our students bring to us." The way he thinks about professional commitment also affects his own career path. Tom indicated that he does not want to give up the energy, fun and excitement he gets from working directly with students by moving up a level in administration, which often results in less student contact. Jean thinks committed professionals "...believe they can make a difference too and that's important and [to] encourage students to make a difference in their lives." She said the students' energy and the success they find, as well as the "thank you's" from students are what keep her in the field. Lisa bases her

commitment to the profession on the value experiential learning is given and appreciates “one of the values that student affairs has is everything you do, you do with students, you engage them in the learning.”

Summary of Qualitative Data

Data for the qualitative portion of this study were collected through in-person interviews with student affairs professionals working at public Michigan universities. Interviews were conducted with three student affairs professionals working in the area of Career Services, three in Housing and Residential Life and three in Student Life.

Four discernable themes and patterns emerged related to the interview participants' experiences as student affairs professionals and as supervisors. These themes and patterns included (a) mentoring; (b) balance; (c) focus on students; and (d) creating opportunities. Each of the interview participants discussed the importance of mentoring in their lives. Several had mentors who had played a role in the decision to enter or remain in the student affairs profession. Others relish the opportunity to serve as a mentor to staff and/or students. Some benefited from the experience of both having a mentor and becoming a mentor.

The majority of interview participants believed working in Student Affairs provided them opportunities to balance a professional with a personal life although maintaining a healthy balance often required concerted effort. Changes in marital status or family often made achieving the right balance more of a priority. Interview participants were concerned not only about finding the right

balance between personal and professional lives for themselves, but also in role modeling that balance for staff who reported to them.

A focus on students was a constant theme throughout the interviews. Interview participants consistently reported that the reason they do the work they do was because of the students. Working with students is important because there are opportunities to make a difference in the lives of students. Interview participants often defined their own success by that achieved in life by the students with whom they worked.

It was also important to interview participants that they created opportunities for staff who report to them. They were supportive of the career goals of their staff, even if that meant leaving the department or institution to advance in the careers. Interview participants viewed the creation of opportunities for staff as part of their responsibilities as supervisors.

Although some interview participants were concerned about staff turnover, they supported the career goals of their staff, even if that meant staff who wanted to advance would leave the institution. Interview participants saw their role as helping staff grow professionally by opening doors so they could move up the career ladder or by helping staff find fulfillment and satisfaction in their current positions.

While interview participants believed that involvement and participation in professional organizations were ways to demonstrate a commitment to the student affairs profession, it was not the defining issue. Their commitment to the profession was based in the excitement and passion they felt about working with

students and the energy they gained in the process. They role model their interactions with students for their staff and demonstrate that the growth and development of students is central to the work they do.

Chapter V

Discussion

Winston and Creamer (1997) defined supervision in higher education as “a management function intended to promote the achievement of institutional goals and to enhance the personal and professional capabilities and performance of staff” (p. 186). They proposed a theoretical model of effective supervision, called synergistic supervision, which should be viewed essentially as a helping process provided by the institution to benefit or support staff rather than as a mechanism for punishment for unsatisfactory performance. Characteristics of synergistic supervision include: dual focus; joint effort; two-way communication; focus on competence (knowledge, work-related skills, personal and professional skills, and attitudes); goals; a systematic and ongoing process; and growth orientation (Winston & Creamer, 1997). This definition acknowledges that meeting the goals of both the individual and the institution is a crucial component of supervision.

There are concerns in the student affairs profession about persistence of employees and about commitment to the profession as demonstrated by participation in professional associations and conferences and through contributions of research and publication. The practice of synergistic supervision, with its dual focus on benefits for both the institution and the individual, can improve retention and increase demonstrated commitment to the profession.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to determine if the perception of the use of behaviors and characteristics of synergistic supervision received influence the persistence of staff in the profession and their commitment to the profession. Persistence was defined by an employee's intention to continue a career in student affairs, regardless of the institution in which they are employed. Commitment to the profession was defined by employee membership in professional organizations, conference attendance, conference participation such as presentations, and involvement in research and publication. Both quantitative and qualitative research methods were used to conduct this study.

After a review of current student affairs literature on supervision, persistence and retention, and commitment to the profession, the following research questions were designed to meet the purpose of the study and direct the study and methods of data analysis.

- 1. Is synergistic supervision practiced in the student affairs profession at public universities in Michigan?**
- 2. Do individuals' perceptions of synergistic supervision received and its focus on meeting the goals of the institution and the personal and professional goals of the employee influence persistence in the student affairs profession?**
- 3. Do individuals' perceptions of synergistic supervision received influence commitment to the student affairs profession?**

Quantitative Study

Methodology.

Data for the quantitative portion of this study were collected through the use of an online survey. In addition to demographic information, the survey included six questions related to supervision received. Descriptive analyses of survey responses were conducted to classify and summarize characteristics of the sample and to examine responses to the supervision questions. Responses to survey questions were examined for differences by Position Title, Gender, Race/Ethnicity, Years Worked as a Student Affairs Professional, Age and Professional Organization membership. Pearson Chi-Square, Pearson correlation coefficients, Spearman rho and *t*-tests were conducted to determine whether or not differences were significant.

Instrumentation

In building a staffing model in student affairs, Winston and Creamer (1997) developed and administered a nationwide survey to examine staffing practices. The survey covered the areas of staff recruitment and selection, new position orientation, job satisfaction, supervisory approaches and content, staff development organization and activities, and performance appraisal practices. Respondents included staff at all levels of the organization. Issues related to both supervision given and supervision received were included. Saunders et al. (2000) explored the validity of the Winston and Creamer staffing model by developing the Synergistic Supervision Scale (SSS). The SSS measures staff member perceptions of the following supervisor behaviors: concern about staff members'

personal and career development; equitable staff treatment; and management that encourages productivity, cooperative problem solving with staff, systematic goal setting, and two-way communication with mutual feedback.

The SSS included 22 items intended to assess the degree to which a supervisor was perceived by the supervisee to demonstrate synergistic supervision behaviors. Subjects rated the frequency of each described behavior based on their perceptions of their current supervisory relationship. Ratings were on a five-point Likert scale (1=never or almost never; 2=seldom; 3=sometimes; 4=often; 5=always or almost always).

I developed a questionnaire (Appendix A) consisting of six questions, informed by the SSS, to address participants' perceptions of their supervisor's use of synergistic supervision. Questions reflected the components of synergistic supervision including dual focus; joint effort; two-way communication; focus on competence; goals; a systematic and ongoing process; and growth orientation. Participants were asked to rate the frequency of each described behavior based on their perceptions of their current supervisory relationship. Ratings were on a five-point Likert scale (1=never or almost never; 2=seldom; 3=sometimes; 4=often; 5=always or almost always).

Participants were asked to provide demographic information regarding job title, educational background and plans, gender, race/ethnicity, age, and years in the profession. Responses to the questions were used to examine potential generational differences, or differences based on respondents' race, gender, years in the profession, or functional areas in which they work. Participants were

asked to list membership in professional organizations as an additional measure to determine their level of commitment to the profession.

Sample.

Since one of the components of synergistic supervision to be explored was related to commitment to the profession, I did not use professional organization membership lists as the only way to identify potential survey participants. Staff names and email addresses were identified through institutional websites and through organizational charts obtained from each of the 15 public universities in Michigan.

Five hundred twenty-six potential participants were identified and emailed an invitation to participate in the survey. The initial invitation was followed by two additional email reminders with requests for participation. Two hundred thirty-seven participants responded to the survey resulting in a 45.1% response rate. This response rate was calculated after purging those participants who visited the website but exited without responding to questions and those who did not receive any of the email messages due to incorrect or faulty addresses or because they had left their institutions.

Qualitative Study

Methodology.

Data for the qualitative portion of this study were collected through interviews. Interview participants were purposefully selected from student affairs professionals employed by public Michigan universities with at least five to ten years of experience in the profession. I asked my colleagues working in the

areas of Career Services, Housing and Residential Life, and Student Life to provide several names of their colleagues working at public Michigan universities. I contacted student affairs professionals working in each of these three areas from the list of names provided and requested interviews. Participants were selected for interviews based on their availability and while they were in the pool of potential participants for the online survey it is unknown if they completed the survey. A face-to-face interview lasting approximately one hour was conducted with each of nine participants at their work sites.

Notes were taken during the interviews, which were tape recorded and then transcribed. A first read of the data provided a general sense of the information and a general impression of its depth, credibility and use (Creswell, 2003). The data were reviewed again to identify emerging common themes. Detailed analysis began with a coding process that was used to break down the data into major topics and unique topics. A descriptive narrative discussed each theme, which were then analyzed to interpret, or make meaning of, the data.

Instrumentation.

Interviews were conducted with selected participants using open-ended questions (Appendix B). Questions were developed, informed by the Winston and Creamer staffing survey (1997), which asked participants to reflect on their personal experiences that have encouraged them to remain in the student affairs profession. They were also asked what they do to keep new professionals in the field, their definition of commitment to the profession and how they developed that commitment, and how supervision has played a role in their retention in and

commitment to the profession. Interview questions differed from survey questions in that they focused not only on participants' perceptions of synergistic supervision received but also on the components of synergistic supervision interview participants practiced. In addition, demographic information about the participants (i.e., age, gender, educational background, and years in the profession) was gathered.

Sample.

Interview participants were purposefully selected from student affairs professionals employed by public Michigan universities with at least five to ten years of experience in the profession. Three participants worked in the areas of Career Services, three in Housing and Residential Life and three in Student Life. A face-to-face interview lasting approximately one hour was conducted with each of nine participants.

Major Findings

Survey participants reported that the actions of their supervisors were consistent with Winston and Creamer's (1997) definition of synergistic supervision regardless of their position title, the length of time they had worked in the profession, their race/ethnicity or gender. When asked to respond to the question "My supervisor and I both contribute when making decisions that affect my area" 74.1% indicated "Often or Always or Almost Always". Seventy-three point four percent responded "Often or Always or Almost Always" to the question "My supervisor and I have a level of trust which allows me to give honest feedback both positive and negative". In response to the question "My supervisor

provides me the information I need to do my job and supports my efforts to improve my knowledge, and personal and professional skills”, 70.4% responded “Often or Always or Almost Always”. Respondents also reported “Often or Always or Almost Always” that “My supervisor and I meet regularly on a pre-determined basis” at a rate of 68.1%. When asked to rate “My supervisor and I develop yearly professional goals that address my strengths and weaknesses” 55.7% responded “Often or Always or Almost Always”. Finally, 53.9% of respondents indicated “Often or Always or Almost Always” for the question “My supervisor helps me understand how my individual goals contribute to the goals of the division and the institution”.

Of the total 237 survey respondents 171 (72.2%) reported membership in a national professional organization and 116 (48.9%) indicated they held membership in regional or state professional organizations. ACPA and NASPA were mentioned most frequently as the national organizations in which respondents held membership with 70 (29.5%) reporting membership in ACPA and 64 (27.0%) in NASPA. Even though respondents could list more than one membership, and some reported membership in both organizations, still only 101 (42.6%) of the total respondents reported belonging to ACPA and/or NASPA, considered to be two of the premier national organizations in the student affairs profession. It is clear from the broad range of organizations (Appendices H & I) in which survey participants held membership that student affairs professionals seek professional development related to their functional areas of work through various organizations in addition to ACPA and NASPA. Other organizations

included the Association of College & University Housing Officers – International, Association of Student Judicial Affairs, National Association for Campus Activities, and the National Academic Advisors Association. Additionally, survey respondents listed organizations that may not be directly related to the student affairs profession but indicate their involvement in social, discipline-specific or community based organizations such as Alpha Kappa Alpha, American Society of Mechanical Engineers, and the Lions Club.

Interview participants also indicated through their comments they practiced the characteristics of synergistic supervision, without using this terminology. Characteristics of synergistic supervision include: dual focus; joint effort; two-way communication; focus on competence (knowledge, work-related skills, personal and professional skills, and attitudes); goals; a systematic and ongoing process; and growth orientation (Winston & Creamer, 1997).

The dual focus in synergistic supervision emphasizes that both the goals of the institution and unit are accomplished as well as the personal and professional goals of staff. Staff members need to be involved in setting and accomplishing both personal and professional goals. At times, it may appear that institutional goals and personal goals may conflict. Supervisors have the responsibility to ensure that tasks are accomplished and that work gets done. However, they may have supervisees who are aware that to advance in the profession they will have to leave the institution. Interview participants demonstrate their support for their supervisees who may leave but do not lower their standards or expectations for the work that needs to be accomplished. In

fact, they often nurture their staff and feel a sense of accomplishment or pride in the success of staff they supervise.

For student affairs professionals in this study, professional life is not totally separate and distinct from a personal life. As supervisors, interview participants acknowledge this by being sensitive to personal issues with which staff may be dealing. The flexibility of work schedules in student affairs often provides one supportive measure supervisors can make available to staff who need to respond to personal issues. Interview participants recognize the job often requires long hours but make a point of paying attention to their own personal needs and/or the needs of their families. They also try to role model this behavior for their staffs and encourage them to find a healthy balance between their personal and professional lives.

Supervisors and their supervisees work together to establish personal and professional goals for the supervisee. It is a relationship built upon trust, respect and openness. This combination of energy makes the approach synergistic, with the outcome equal to more than the sum of its parts (Winston & Creamer, 1997). Interview participants try to create a work environment built on the concept of teamwork. They often view themselves as just one part of the team rather than playing the more traditional hierarchical role of supervisors who give instructions to supervisees and expect their "orders" will be carried out with little input from supervisees and without providing an understanding of how each person's work fit into the overall goals of the unit, the division or the university. As "team leader", supervisors still have responsibility to ensure that work is done, but the

tasks are accomplished in an atmosphere based on a level of trust and in which everyone contributes to the goals.

Two-way communication is more likely to occur when a high level of trust has been established between the supervisor and staff members. A relationship between the supervisor and supervisees predicated on trust will create a climate in which honest and direct feedback flows both ways (Winston & Creamer, 1997). Two-way communication is important to interview participants as they welcome feedback from supervisees and maintain what was often described as an “open door” policy. One method they use to build trust is to ensure confidentiality. Another is to take responsibility for not just the successes, but also the failures of work performed by their staff.

Synergistic supervision also focuses on competence. Both the supervisor and the supervisee strive to enhance their knowledge and information about student development; work-related skills such as interpersonal communication, goal setting, public relations, leadership, confrontation, conflict resolution, computer usage, bookkeeping, and clerical skills; personal and professional skills including time management, personal management such as diet or exercise, retirement planning, anger control, career planning, or stress management; and attitudes (Winston & Creamer, 1997). There is also an expectation of competence in intercultural knowledge and skills, critical thinking and problem solving skills as well as familiarity with legal, professional, and ethical standards and institutional policies. One way interview participants help staff gain competence is to ensure they have the skills and information they need to do

their jobs. The supervisors in this study provide support for conference and workshop attendance and participation as well as professional organization memberships. Even though providing this kind of support can be difficult when resources are scarce, the supervisors I interviewed manage to find ways to do so. They read professional publications and join internet list serves that focus on topics related to their work, modeling behavior for their staff and encouraging them to do the same.

Goal-based synergistic supervision carries an expectation that goals are established then periodically reviewed and evaluated through regular supervisor/supervisee meetings (Winston & Creamer, 1997). Adjustments are made as needed. Several interview participants spoke specifically about the way they help staff develop goals and emphasized the input that supervisees have in developing their own goals. Discussions about goals occur both formally and informally and are developed based on the strengths, weaknesses and interests of staff in the context of achieving departmental and institutional goals. As supervisors, they then support the goals and meet with supervisees several times during the year to assess and reevaluate the goals.

Synergistic supervision is a systematic and ongoing process that becomes a routine part of professional life. Holistically, synergistic supervision responds to not only people's professional concerns but also their personal attitudes and beliefs. The supervisor and supervisees engage in an on-going dialogue process to help supervisees be more effective in their professional performance, personal living, and career development (Winston & Creamer, 1997). Interview

participants believe strongly that performance appraisal is not an evaluation that occurs once each year but is a process that happens on a regular basis.

Typically, supervisors meet with staff as a group and individually weekly or biweekly. In addition, an evaluation of an activity or project is conducted at its completion. As supervisors, interview participants also take interest in and some responsibility for the career development of staff who report to them. They support participation in professional development activities which help staff gain skills that will improve their job performance or help them gain experiences to advance in the profession.

With a focus on growth orientation rather than on correcting problems or discipline, staff can benefit from a work place that is stimulating and rewarding (Winston & Creamer, 1997). When potential problems are identified, the proactivity aspect of synergistic supervision allows problems to be identified early, by the supervisor and/or the supervisee and both can work together on the resolution of issues. On-going conversations and frequent contact with their staffs give interview participants opportunities to identify problematic situations quickly. Having built a level of trust and established open communication, staff is more likely to come to interview participants, as supervisors, with information that might be perceived as negative.

Persistence in the Student Affairs Profession.

Earlier in this study, I defined persistence in the profession as an employee's intention to continue a career in student affairs, regardless of the institution by which they are employed. The number of years a practitioner

remains in the student affairs profession is one indicator of persistence.

Responses to survey questions were fairly consistent regardless of the number of years practitioners had been in the profession. Analysis using Pearson Chi-square, Pearson correlation coefficients and Spearman rho demonstrated statistically significant differences in responses to *Question 2: My supervisor and I meet regularly on a pre-determined basis* depending on the number of years survey participants had worked in the student affairs profession. The significance of r is strongly influenced by the size of the sample. In a large sample ($N=100+$) as in this study, very small correlations may be statistically significant. Further examination of Question 2 reveals that career stage bias may be built into this question. In the student affairs profession, as in many other fields, supervisors typically meet with new employees more often than they meet with more seasoned professionals. It therefore follows that the newest employees (those with one to three years in the profession) would report they meet regularly with their supervisors on a pre-determined basis at a higher rate than other employees report. When Question 2 is eliminated from the analysis, examination of responses to the other five questions shows that there is no negative correlation between the Years Worked as Student Affairs Professional category and responses to the survey questions. Survey respondents indicated their supervisors practiced components of synergistic supervision consistently and regardless of the number of years those who were supervised had been in the profession.

As people make career choices, salary is often one of the factors taken under consideration. Potential for increasing annual income often influences decisions to remain in a profession. None of the interview participants identify high salaries as one of the reasons they entered or continue working in the student affairs profession. In fact, Larry emphatically states it is “definitely not the money” that keeps him in the profession. Rather, he thinks “it’s those intrinsic things, seeing students grow, develop.” Interview participants who had advanced in their careers, often moving to new institutions or accepting new positions, did not make their career choices based on salaries. Decisions to take new positions were often based on family and “quality of life” issues, to gain new experiences, or to advance a career.

None of the interview participants indicate plans to leave the student affairs profession in the near future although several are beginning to think about retirement. These student affairs practitioners have been in the field from 8 to 25 years and are not considered new professionals by any means. The longer student affairs professionals remain in the field and in higher education, the more likely it is they will remain in the profession for their careers. (Wood, Winston & Polkosnik, 1985). Interview participants share their enthusiasm and excitement about student affairs work with their supervisees, encourage their staffs to develop personally and professionally, and support them when they want to advance in the profession. They are also supportive if staff want to continue to grow in their current positions or if their career paths lead them out of student affairs and higher education.

Each of the interview participants gives credit to a person for sparking their interest in the profession. They have stayed in the field because of their dedication to students and the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of others. Along the way, they have continued to receive mentoring and have become mentors to other staff as well as students. They have benefited from both receiving and providing the elements constituting synergistic supervision even though that terminology may never have been used. They are engaged, and engage their supervisees, in on-going dialogues which help supervisees become more effective in their professional performance, personal living, and career development. At the same time, they integrate professional standards in their work and expect themselves and their staff to perform as competent practitioners.

Cutler (2003) believes that to retain student affairs professionals, "...it is crucial for supervisors and colleagues to model the importance of having time to foster personal growth" (p. 176). Supervisors in this study believe that encouraging both the personal and professional growth of their staffs is part of their responsibility. While the goals of the department and the institution are important, the personal and professional goals of staff are equally valid. This emphasis on the goals of both the institution and of the professional staff is consistent with synergistic supervision.

Commitment to the Profession.

For the purpose of this study, commitment to the profession was defined by employee membership in professional organizations, conference attendance,

conference participation such as presentations, and involvement in research and publication. Survey respondents were asked to list professional organizations in which they held membership. There were no statistically significant differences in the responses to survey questions by participants who indicated membership in national professional organizations and those who did not indicate any memberships. Additionally, there were no statistically significant differences in the responses to survey questions by participants who indicated membership in regional/state professional organizations and those who did not indicate any memberships.

Interview participants indicate that membership in professional organizations plays a role in professional life. According to the level of participants' involvement in organizations, attendance and participation in conferences can provide valuable networking opportunities. Conference and workshop participation can also provide opportunities to enhance skills that complement the work professionals do.

Some interview participants note the value that research and publishing can bring to the profession and to the individual. More often, they mention the value student affairs professionals receive by reading student affairs' literature and keeping abreast with current issues in the profession. Several interview participants had been encouraged early in their own professional careers to stay on top of the literature and current issues, and encouraged their staff to do the same.

Professional organizations also provide practitioners guidelines and standards for practice. Lisa is one of several interview participants who indicate they look to the professional organizations, such as NASPA, ACPA and Midwest ACE for standards, administrative structures and best practices. Donna believes that professional guidelines and a code of ethics help her feel she is definitely part of a profession. The guidelines carry over to her own division of student affairs through nine guiding principles. At Larry's institution, copies of standards hang on the wall in all of their offices in the division.

Rather than defining commitment to the student affairs profession as demonstrated by practitioners improving and expanding their skills through membership in professional associations, attendance at conferences, making presentations at conferences and through involvement in research and publication, these activities may actually form a definition of professionalism. According to Winston and Creamer (1997), "one sign of professionalism is affiliation with associations devoted to the advancement of the field" (p. 98). Professionalism and commitment to the profession are not the same for these interview participants.

According to those who participated in my study, commitment to the student affairs profession is based in a commitment to students and in making a difference in the lives of students with whom they interact. As they advanced in the profession and became supervisors, an additional commitment to the staff they supervise developed. Commitment to the profession, as demonstrated by a commitment to students and staff is complimented by mentoring, finding balance

between personal and professional goals and lives and by creating opportunities for others to grow.

Over and over again interview participants returned to a discussion about the importance of students in their work, and in turn, in their lives. "It's all about the students", says Donna. According to Lisa "everything you do, you do with students". To Paul, "...it's not about self, it's about the students". The commitment to students expressed by interview participants is consistent with responses to the staffing survey Winston and Creamer (1997) conducted. Overwhelmingly, staff who responded to the Winston and Creamer survey indicated that working directly with students was the greatest reward they received from their jobs.

The dedication to students and their growth is demonstrated by the role the staff in this study plays as mentors. They relish being mentors to students. Each of the interview participants had benefited from mentoring and wanted to do the same for others. Some of the mentoring opportunities developed through their positions as supervisors with the staff who reported directly to them. However, there were also opportunities to serve in this role to colleagues, former staff and former students.

Interview participants stress the importance of finding balance between their personal and professional lives. While they are dedicated student affairs professionals, they do not want to sacrifice their personal lives for their professional careers. They also feel some responsibility to ensure that staff who report to them give attention to their personal lives. Boehman (2006) refers to this

balance as work/non-work interaction and states it “is an important aspect of organizational commitment among student affairs professionals” (p. 1). Boehman (2006) reports “it appears that organizations that take employees’ work/non-work interaction into account are perceived as being more supportive, and lead to increased commitment on the part of the employee” (p. 2). The actions interview participants report they take demonstrate they are aware of the hours their staff work and they encourage staff to take advantage of the flexibility offered by the student affairs field to take time out for themselves, their families, and a social life. Student affairs professionals are educators. As educators, they “should be able to role model for students as well as for younger professionals the ability to effectively balance work and non-work commitments” (Boehman, 2006, p.5). Interview participants’ concern about the individual’s well being and not just the well being of the institution helps create a supportive environment. According to Boehman (2006), “if an individual believes that his or her supervisor cares about him or her, it is translated into a perception of organizational support” (p. 3).

Research Questions

The first research question asked if synergistic supervision is practiced in the student affairs profession at public universities in Michigan. Survey respondents indicated they received synergistic supervision regardless of their Position Title, Gender, Race/Ethnicity, Years Worked as a Student Affairs Professional, Age or Professional Organization membership. Interview participants reported they not only received synergistic supervision but they also practiced synergistic supervision with staff who reported to them.

The second research question asked if individuals' perceptions of synergistic supervision received and its focus on meeting the goals of the institution and the personal and professional goals of the employee influence persistence in the student affairs profession. Survey respondents indicated they received synergistic supervision regardless of the number of years they have worked in the student affairs profession.

Interview participants reported they entered the student affairs profession and remain in the profession primarily because of their commitment to working with students and helping them develop. However, one factor that allows them to perform the student-focused work that is important to them is that they have benefited from the synergistic supervision characteristics practiced by their supervisors. Interview participants perceive that the synergistic supervision they have received gives them the opportunity to develop both personally and professionally and contributes to their persistence in the student affairs profession.

The third research question asked if individuals' perceptions of synergistic supervision received influence commitment to the student affairs profession. The definition of commitment to the profession I used at the beginning of the study included employee membership in professional organizations, conference attendance, conference participation such as presentations, and involvement in research and publication. A different definition of commitment to the profession emerged through the interviews in the qualitative portion of this study. The new definition of commitment to the student affairs profession is based in a

commitment to students and in making a difference in the lives of students and staff. The components of synergistic supervision received allow both survey respondents and interview participants to demonstrate their commitment to the profession.

Implications of Major Findings

This study contributes knowledge in the areas of synergistic supervision, persistence in and commitment to the student affairs profession. Survey participants reported that the actions of their supervisors were consistent with Winston and Creamer's (1997) definition of synergistic supervision regardless of their position title, the length of time they had worked in the profession, their race/ethnicity or gender.

Even though interview participants may not be aware of the term, they have participated in many of the elements of synergistic supervision. They have emphasized the goals of both the institution and of professional staff, and evaluated staff goals on a regular basis. As supervisors, they worked with supervisees to establish personal and professional goals through a relationship built on trust, respect and openness. This allowed open and honest feedback to flow between the supervisor and the supervisee providing the opportunity to identify problems early and to work together to resolve issues. It also provides supervisors the opportunity to get feedback and evaluate their own performance as supervisors. Synergistic supervision creates an environment in which staff can be more effective in their professional performance, personal living, and in their careers.

Commitment to the student affairs profession is strengthened when the organization supports a balance between work and non-work interaction. The ability to maintain a balance between personal and professional goals allows student affairs professionals to become “whole” persons. Practitioners are not required to sacrifice or ignore a personal life in order to be considered successful professionals who are dedicated to their work. The student affairs profession is built on the basic tenet that development of the student as a whole person is important. By carrying over this belief to the development of staff individuals are more likely to experience personal and professional satisfaction and will be less likely to leave the profession.

Although the behaviors of survey participants as supervisors indicated they practiced synergistic supervision, they did not use the terminology and gave no indication they were familiar with the practice. Most of the interview participants indicated they had never been trained in supervision. They learned how to supervise from their experiences as supervisees, both good and bad. It is possible that their commitment to the development of students and staff and to the student affairs profession led them to intuitively practice components of synergistic supervision. Student affairs is considered to be one of the “helping” professions and according to Winston and Creamer (1997), “supervision is viewed as essentially a helping process, which is designed to support staff as they seek to promote the goals of the organizations and to advance their professional development” (p. 194). Practitioners who enter the field tend to genuinely care about others and are dedicated to serving the interests of

individuals and society (Winston & Creamer, 1997; Young, 1996). The commitment interview participants have for the personal and professional development of others leads them to put the elements of synergistic supervision into practice.

While the literature reflects a continuing concern about the quality of supervision in the student affairs profession, participants in this study indicate they are receiving quality supervision. One reason this disagreement about the quality of supervision being provided may be due to a lack of a clear definition of supervision. The survey questions in this study asked about the use of specific behaviors related to the components of synergistic supervision rather than asking more generally how participants felt about their supervisors or the supervision they received. This allowed survey participants to objectively evaluate whether or not the components of synergistic supervision were being practiced by their supervisors by disaggregating behaviors from personality.

New, young professionals often enter the student affairs field expecting their supervisor to become their friend, confidant and mentor. They bring expectations that this new friend will be available to them whenever they need them and will provide them unquestioned support and encouragement. While supervisors may play some of these roles, they may also be providing constructive criticism and negative feedback that were unexpected and for which the young professional was unprepared to receive. The unrealistic expectations that student affairs professionals, especially young professionals, have of their supervisors may be contributing to the perception that there is a lack of quality

supervision being provided. Focusing on specific behaviors that comprise good supervision such as those related to the components of synergistic supervision allows us to shift from what amounts to perceptions of satisfaction with supervision received to creating the opportunity to objectively evaluate characteristics of good supervision. The model of synergistic supervision developed by Winston and Creamer (1997) provides us with guidelines to follow and with a perspective with which to evaluate the effectiveness of supervision practiced in the student affairs profession.

Limitations

Survey participants were identified through university Web sites and organizational charts. Examination of all university Web sites and organizational charts in the United States for potential participants would not be possible, so only public universities in Michigan were included in the study. This limited the number of potential participants to approximately five hundred and may have excluded some individuals who are not listed on Web sites or those in units without accessible and detailed organizational charts.

Participants were employees of Michigan public universities and were not evenly divided among institutional types, sizes and functional areas of employment. Results of the study may not be generalizable to other universities in the United States.

The structure of student affairs divisions is defined differently at various institutions. A functional area considered part of a student affairs division at one

university may not be part of the student affairs division at another. Survey respondents may not be representative of all functional areas.

Individuals who have previously worked in the student affairs profession but have not persisted are not included in this study. Their perceptions of synergistic supervision received and its influence on their persistence in and commitment to the profession may have been different than survey and interview participants.

Additional factors that may influence an individual's persistence in the student affairs profession have not been taken into account in this study. Some individuals are in a dual career relationship that may not allow them to be flexible geographically. Partner or other family commitments may influence their decision to remain at their current institution, and therefore, in the profession.

An on-line survey may have limited participation of some subjects who are not familiar with the methodology or distrust the security of the information they provide.

The purposive sampling procedure for interviews decreased the generalizability of the findings. In-person interviews also have limitations. Informants' responses in interviews may be biased by the researcher's presence. Additionally, not all informants are equally articulate or perceptive. The findings in this qualitative research method may be subject to other interpretations.

Recommendations for Further Study

Analysis of responses to survey questions demonstrated some statistically significant differences in how regularly participants met with their supervisors

depending on the number of years they had spent in the profession. While statistically significant, these differences may not have much significance in practice but warrant further investigation. Additional statistical analysis may identify or explain the importance of regular meetings between synergistic supervisors and their staff.

The development of commitment to the profession should be further explored to examine the influence of supervision. It would be interesting to conduct a study to examine the intentions of student affairs professionals to continue in the profession and their involvement in professional development activities such as organization membership, conference attendance, workshop presentations and publication. Some professionals may decide after a short period of time in their positions that they will change careers so limit their involvement in professional development activities. Others may find that even though they would like to become involved in professional development activities departmental or institutional budgets limit their participation.

Further study should be conducted on the perceptions of synergistic supervision received and given with supervisors and their direct reports. It would be interesting to learn if the perceptions supervisors hold regarding their style of supervision matched the perceptions of those they supervised.

It would also be valuable to conduct an updated retention study of student affairs professionals. While there appears to be continued concern about retention in the field, few retention studies have been conducted since the 1980's. A new study may be especially enlightening given the probability that

many entering the student affairs profession in the near future will be members of the millennial generation. Millennials may bring different expectations and demands to the profession which will need to be addressed to improve retention in the field.

Further research should be conducted examining the reasons why student affairs professionals leave the field. While it may not be possible to study those professionals who have previously left the field, exit surveys could be conducted as professionals leave to determine if their perceptions of synergistic supervision received influenced their decision.

Appendix A
Supervision Survey

Demographic Information

Position title: (*Check one best response.*)

- ☐ Vice President
- ☐ Associate/Assistant Vice President
- ☐ Dean
- ☐ Associate/Assistant Dean
- ☐ Department Head/Director
- ☐ Associate/Assistant Department Head/Director
- ☐ Residence Area Director
- ☐ Coordinator
- ☐ Other: Specify: _____

Highest degree earned: (*Check one.*)

- ☐ High school and/or technical school diploma
- ☐ Associate
- ☐ Baccalaureate
- ☐ Master's
- ☐ Doctorate
- ☐ Other (please specify _____)

Major field of highest degree earned: (*Check one.*)

- ☐ Student Affairs
- ☐ Counseling or Counseling Psychology
- ☐ Higher Education
- ☐ Business
- ☐ Other Fields (such as English, biology, Russian literature, or philosophy)

Are you currently pursuing further degrees? (*Check one.*)

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

Do you plan to pursue a further degree? (*Check one.*)

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

Sex (*Check one.*)

- ☐ Female ☐ Male

Racial/Ethnic Background (*Check single best response.*)

- ☐ African American
- ☐ Asian American or Pacific Islander
- ☐ Caucasian/White American (non-Hispanic)
- ☐ Hispanic American

Appendix A (continued).

- ☐ Multicultural
- ☐ North American Indigenous/American Indian/Native American
- ☐ Other (please specify _____)

Age (Check one.)

- ☐ 25 or younger
- ☐ 26-30
- ☐ 31-35
- ☐ 36-40
- ☐ 41-45
- ☐ 46-50
- ☐ 51-55
- ☐ 56-60
- ☐ 61-65
- ☐ 66 or older

Years (including the current year) worked in Student Affairs as a professional (Check one.)

- ☐ 1-3
- ☐ 4-6
- ☐ 7-9
- ☐ 10-12
- ☐ 13-15
- ☐ 16-18
- ☐ 19-21
- ☐ 22 or more

Current membership in *national* professional organizations

Current membership in *regional or state* professional organizations

Indicate the functional areas in which you have assigned responsibility by ranking them. Assign 1 for the most time consuming, 2 for less time consuming, and 3 for the least time consuming responsibility. (Do not rank all the functional areas.

Many staff members will work in a single functional area; if that is the case, enter a 1 before that functional area.)

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ Academic Assistance | ☐ Judicial (discipline) |
| ☐ Academic Advising | ☐ Leadership Programs |
| ☐ Admissions | ☐ Minority Student Programs |
| ☐ Alcohol/Drug Education | ☐ Orientation |
| ☐ Campus Activities | ☐ Registrar |
| ☐ Career Services | ☐ Research and/or Evaluation |

Appendix A (continued).

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ Child Care | ☐ Recreational Sports |
| ☐ Counseling and Testing | ☐ Service Learning/Volunteer Programs |
| ☐ Facilities Management | ☐ Staff Development and Training |
| ☐ Financial Aid | ☐ Student Affairs Division Administration |
| ☐ Greek Life | ☐ (across areas) |
| ☐ Housing and Residence Life | ☐ Student Union |
| ☐ International Students | ☐ Wellness |
| | ☐ Women's Programs |
| ☐ Other: _____ | |

Directions: For each item indicate the one response that most closely reflects your experience with your current supervisor. Respond using the following scale:

- 1 = never or almost never**
2 = seldom
3 = sometimes
4 = often
5 = always or almost always

☐ **My supervisor and I develop yearly professional development goals that address my strengths and weaknesses.**

☐ **My supervisor and I meet regularly on a pre-determined basis.**

☐ **My supervisor provides me the information I need to do my job and supports my efforts to improve my knowledge, and personal and professional skills.**

☐ **My supervisor and I both contribute when making decisions that affect my area of responsibilities.**

☐ **My supervisor helps me understand how my individual goals contribute to the goals of the division and institution.**

☐ **My supervisor and I have a level of trust, which allows me to give honest feedback, both positive and negative.**

Appendix B

**On-line Informed Consent Form
Michigan State University
Virginia Randall, Investigator
Dr. Marilyn Amey, Faculty Advisor**

I am a graduate student at Michigan State University, working on my doctoral degree in Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Education. I am asking you to participate in this research study. The purpose of this study is to examine the influence of supervision on retention in and commitment to the student affairs profession.

The anticipated benefits of this study include: to contribute to the existing literature on supervision in student affairs; to expand the understanding of retention in student affairs; and to explore the definition of commitment to the profession.

There are no reasonably foreseeable risks or discomforts for you.

If you agree to participate in this study, here is what will happen:

- 1. I will ask you to completely read this page and select the “continue” button below to communicate your informed consent to participate in this study.**
- 2. If you select the “continue” button, you will be redirected to a questionnaire, which will take you approximately fifteen (15) minutes to complete.**

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Data collected for this study becomes the property of the researcher. The information in the study records will be kept strictly confidential and will be stored securely in secure server space that is only accessible by me.

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Ginger Randall, at randallg@gvsu.edu or by phone at (616) 331-3585, or my academic advisor, Marilyn Amey, at amey@msu.edu or by phone at (517) 432-1056. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a study participant, or are dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of this study, you may contact – anonymously, if you wish - Peter Vasilenko, Ph.D., Director of Human Research Protections, (517) 355-2180, fax (517) 432-4503, email irb@msu.edu, mail 202 Olds Hall, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI 48824-1047.

By selecting “continue” below, you indicate that you have read and acknowledge the above information. That you willingly participate in this study, and that you

Appendix B (continued).

understand you may withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time.

Continue

Please contact randallg@gvsu.edu if you have any questions about this survey.

Appendix C

Initial Email Message Requesting Participation in Survey

**From: Ginger Randall
To: Ginger Randall
Bc: (individual email addresses)
Subject: Supervision in Student Affairs
Date: April 3, 2006**

Dear Student Affairs Colleague:

You can contribute to a new study on supervision in student affairs. As a Doctoral Candidate in the Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Education program at Michigan State University, I am currently conducting a dissertation research study to examine how supervision influences retention in the student affairs profession and commitment to the profession.

I hope that you will decide to participate in this study. Participation will involve completing an online survey located at (<http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.asp?u=363351882489>). The survey, including demographic items and six questions on supervision, should take less than ten minutes to complete.

**To complete the survey, simply click on the following link:
<http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.asp?u=363351882489>**

Thank you for your participation. If you have any questions or concerns about this study or your participation, please call me at (616) 331-3585 or email me at randallg@gvsu.edu.

**Ginger Randall
Michigan State University**

Appendix D

Second Email Message Requesting Participation In Survey

**From: Ginger Randall
To: Ginger Randall
Bc: (individual email addresses)
Subject: Supervision Survey
Date: April 10, 2006**

Student Affairs Colleague:

Last Monday I sent you an email inviting you to participate in a survey on supervision in student affairs. If you have already completed the survey, thank you!

As a Doctoral Candidate in the Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Education program at Michigan State University, I am currently conducting a dissertation research study to examine how supervision influences retention in the student affairs profession and commitment to the profession.

I hope that you will decide to participate in this study. Participation will involve completing an online survey which includes demographic items and six questions on supervision. It should take less than ten minutes to complete.

**To complete the survey, simply click on the following link:
<http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.asp?u=363351882489>**

Thank you for your participation. If you have any questions or concerns about this study or your participation, please call me at (616) 331-3585 or email me at randallg@gvsu.edu.

**Ginger Randall
Michigan State University**

Appendix E

Third Email Message Requesting Participation In Survey

**From: Ginger Randall
To: Ginger Randall
Bc: (individual email addresses)
Subject: Supervision Survey – Final Reminder
Date: April 17, 2006**

Student Affairs Colleague:

Thanks to all of you who have already completed this survey. This is the final reminder I will be sending about the survey and encourage you to participate if you haven't already.

As a Doctoral Candidate in the Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Education program at Michigan State University, I am currently conducting a dissertation research study to examine how supervision influences retention in the student affairs profession and commitment to the profession.

I hope that you will decide to participate in this study. Participation will involve completing an online survey which includes demographic items and six questions on supervision. It should take less than ten minutes to complete.

**To complete the survey, simply click on the following link:
<http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.asp?u=363351882489>**

Thank you for your participation. If you have any questions or concerns about this study or your participation, please call me at (616) 331-3585 or email me at randallg@gvsu.edu.

**Ginger Randall
Michigan State University**

Appendix F

Interview Questions

Would you take a few minutes to tell me about your background and how you got to where you are today?

Please describe a person who has demonstrated a commitment to the student affairs profession.

How do you help developing that commitment in new professionals?

You've been in the student affairs profession for a while. What kinds of things happened for you that kept you in the field?

There is some concern about the high numbers of new professionals leaving the field. What kinds of things do you do to help keep promising staff in the profession?

How has supervision played a role in your decision to stay in the profession?

How has supervision played a role in your commitment to the profession?

Appendix G

**Interview Informed Consent Form
Michigan State University
Virginia Randall, Investigator
Dr. Marilyn Amey, Faculty Advisor**

I am a graduate student at Michigan State University, working on my doctoral degree in Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Education. I am asking you to participate in this research study. The purpose of this study is to examine the influence of supervision on retention in and commitment to the student affairs profession.

The anticipated benefits of this study include: to contribute to the existing literature on supervision in student affairs; to expand the understanding of retention in student affairs; and to explore the definition of commitment to the profession.

There are no reasonably foreseeable risks or discomforts for you.

If you agree to participate in this study, here is what will happen:

- 1. I will ask you to completely read this page and sign the form at the bottom to communicate your informed consent to participate in this study.**
- 2. If you sign the form, you will participate in an interview, which will last approximately one hour.**

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. I would like to audio record the interview. You may have the tape discontinued at any time and for any duration.

Data collected for this study becomes the property of the researcher. The information in the study records will be kept strictly confidential and will be stored securely in space that is only accessible by me.

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Ginger Randall, at randallg@gvsu.edu or by phone at (616) 331-3585, or my academic advisor, Marilyn Amey, at amey@msu.edu or by phone at (517) 432-1056. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a study participant, or are dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of this study, you may contact – anonymously, if you wish - Peter Vasilenko, Ph.D., Director of Human Research Protections, (517) 355-2180, fax (517) 432-4503, email irb@msu.edu, mail 202 Olds Hall, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI 48824-1047.

By signing the form below, you indicate that you have read and acknowledge the above information. That you willingly participate in this study, and that you

Appendix G (continued).

understand you may withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time. You will receive a copy of this form.

Signature

Date

Printed Name

Appendix H

Membership in National Professional Organizations Reported by Survey Participants*

AAHEG (1)
ACHA (1)
Alpha Kappa Alpha (1)
Alpha Kappa Psi (1)
Alpha Phi Omega (1)
American Association of Collegiate Registrars & Admissions Officers (1)
American Association of University Professors (1)
American Association of University Women (1)
American Association for Employment in Education (4)
American College Personnel Association (70)
American Council on Education (1)
American Counseling Association (3)
American Educational Research Association (1)
American Indian Science and Engineering Society (1)
American Institute of Architects (1)
American Institutes for Research (1)
American Psychological Association (1)
American Society of Engineering Educators (1)
American Society of Mechanical Engineers (1)
Association of American Colleges & Universities (1)
Association of College & University Housing Officers – International (30)
Association of College Unions International (3)
Association of Collegiate Conference and Events Directors - International (1)
Association of Fraternity Advisors (12)
Association of Higher Education & Disability (3)
Association of Physical Plant Administrators (2)
Association of Recovery Schools (1)
Association of Student Judicial Affairs (12)
Association for the Study of Higher Education (3)
Association for Volunteer Administrators (1)
Big Ten Housing (1)
Campus Compact (2)
Co-ed Professional Business Fraternity (1)
College Reading and Learning Association (1)
Cooperative Education & Internship Association (1)
Court Appointed Special Advocates (1)
Delta Sigma Theta (1)
GEM (1)
Graduate Career Consortium (1)
International Ombudsman Association (3)
International Learning Disabilities Association (1)

Appendix H (continued).

John D. O'Bryant National Think Tank for Black Professionals in Higher Education on Predominantly White Campuses (1)
King-Chavez-Parks (1)
League of United Latin American Citizens (1)
Mid-American Association of Educational Opportunity Program Personnel (1)
MentorNet (1)
Michigan Library Association (1)
Midwest Association of Colleges and Employers (2)
NAFA (1)
NAFSA: Association of International Educators (2)
NASPA: National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (64)
National Academic Advisors Association (8)
National Action Council for Minorities in Engineering (1)
National Association for Campus Activities (12)
National Association for College Admission Counseling (2)
National Association for Developmental Education (1)
National Association of Advisors for the Health Professions (1)
National Association of College and University Attorneys (1)
National Association of College and University Business Officers (1)
National Association of College Auxiliary Services (1)
National Association of College Counseling (1)
National Association of College & University Food Services (1)
National Association of Colleges & Employers (19)
National Association of Multicultural Engineering Program Advocates (2)
National Association of Pre-Law Advisors (1)
National Career Development Association (4)
National Council of English Educators (1)
National Council of Women's Organizations (1)
National Education Association (1)
National Intramural-Recreational Sports Association (5)
National Society of Black Engineers (2)
Native American Program Action Group (1)
North American Orientation Directors Association (7)
Omicron Delta Kappa (2)
Order of Omega (1)
Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity (1)
Phi Delta Kappa (1)
Public Relations (1)
Rotary International (1)
Sigma Phi Epsilon (1)
Sisters of the Academy (1)
Social Justice Institute (1)
Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers (1)

Appendix H (continued).

Society of Women Engineers (1)
Society for College and University Planning (1)
Society for Human Resource Management (2)
Special Libraries Association (1)
University and College Designers Association (1)
Wade McCree Scholarships (1)
Women in Engineering Programs & Advocates Network (3)
Women in Higher Education (1)
Wordcraft Circle of Native American Writers (1)
Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc. (2)

*** Participants could list as many memberships as they chose**

Appendix I

Membership in Regional and State Professional Organizations Reported by Survey Participants*

Administrative Professionals Union of NMU (1)
Advocates for Latino Student Advancement in Michigan Education (1)
American Indian Science and Engineering Society-Regional (1)
American Institute of Architects Huron Valley Chapter (1)
Association of College Unions International Region 7 (1)
Central Association of Advisors for the Health Professions (1)
Community Service Directors (1)
Cooperative Education & Internship Association (1)
Directors of Volunteers in Agencies (1)
District of Columbia Bar (1)
First Year Experience (1)
Great Lakes Assoc of College & University Housing Officers (39)
GVSU Alumni Association (1)
Keweenaw Economic Development Alliance (1)
King-Parks-Chavez (1)
Learning Disabilities Association of Michigan (1)
Lions Club (1)
MACACA (1)
MI-Access, Michigan's Alternative Assessment Program (7)
MI-ICE (1)
Michigan Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (1)
Michigan Housing and Dining Services Officers Association (1)
Midwest Association of Colleges and Employers (2)
Michigan Academic Advisors Association (3)
Michigan Association of Collegiate Career and Employment Services (7)
Michigan Association for Higher Education & Disabilities (4)
Michigan Association of International Educators (1)
Michigan Bar (2)
Michigan Campus Compact (5)
Michigan Career Advising Association (1)
Michigan College Counseling Association (1)
Michigan College English Educators (1)
Michigan College Personnel Association (27)
Michigan College & University Professionals in Personnel Administration (1)
Michigan Council for Internships & Co-op Education (2)
Michigan Counseling Association (1)
Michigan Education Association (2)
Michigan Housing & Dining Services Officers Association (4)
Michigan Internship and Co-op Association (1)
Michigan Intramural Recreational Sports Association (1)
Michigan Libraries Association (1)

Appendix I (continued).

Michigan Organization of Residence Hall Association (1)
Michigan Student Financial Aid Association (1)
Michigan's Promise (1)
Mid-American Association of Educational Opportunity Program Personnel (1)
Mid Michigan Area Placement Council (1)
Mid Michigan Human Resource Association (2)
Midwest ACE (6)
Midwest Association of Colleges and Employers (6)
Midwest Association of Pre-Law Advisors (1)
Midwest Coalition of Ombudsmen (1)
Midwest Cooperative Education & Internships (1)
MOSPA (1)
MSGC (1)
Multicultural Association of Professionals - Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce
(1)
NAFSA: Association of International Educators Region V (1)
National Association for Campus Activities Mid America Region (3)
National Society of Black Engineers (1)
NASPA Region IV-East (1)
North American Orientation Directors Association Region 7 (2)
Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers (1)
UAW 2718 (1)
Wisconsin College Personnel Association (1)

*** Participants could list as many memberships as they chose.**

Appendix J

Functional Area of Responsibility

Please rank the functional areas in which you have responsibility.

Assign 1 for the most time consuming

Assign 2 for less time consuming

Assign 3 for least time consuming

(Do not rank all the functional areas. Many staff members will work in a single functional area; if that is the case assign a 1 for that functional area.)

Functional Area	Most Time Consuming		Less Time Consuming		Least Time Consuming	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Academic Advising	8	3.7	7	4.0	14	8.5
Academic Assisting	1	0.5	6	3.4	6	3.6
Admissions	1	0.5	4	2.3	8	4.8
Alcohol/Drug Education	2	0.9	5	2.8	5	3.0
Campus Activities	9	4.1	18	10.2	14	8.5
Career Services	32	14.7	4	2.3	1	0.6
Child Care	1	0.5	-	-	2	1.2
Counseling and Testing	2	0.9	6	3.4	2	1.2
Facilities Management	5	2.3	7	4.0	8	4.8
Financial Aid	1	0.5	1	0.6	1	0.6
Greek Life	2	0.9	1	0.6	7	4.2
Housing/Residence Life	89	40.8	5	2.8	4	2.4
International Students	2	0.9	1	0.6	3	1.8
Judicial (discipline)	6	2.8	24	13.6	16	9.7
Leadership Programs	6	2.8	9	5.1	6	3.6
Minority Student Programs	11	5.0	4	2.3	2	1.2
Orientation	3	1.4	12	6.8	8	4.8
Registrar	1	0.5	-	-	-	-
Research and/or Evaluation	1	0.5	2	1.1	4	2.4

Appendix J (continued).

Functional Area	Most Time Consuming		Less Time Consuming		Least Time Consuming	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Recreational Sports	1	0.5	-	-	2	1.2
Service Learning/Volunteer Programs	4	1.8	5	2.8	2	1.2
Staff Development and Training	4	1.8	20	11.3	23	13.9
Student Affairs Division Administration	10	4.6	10	5.6	9	5.5
Student Union	3	1.4	4	2.3	2	1.2
Study Abroad	-	-	1	0.6	3	1.8
Wellness	-	-	3	1.7	3	1.8
Women's Programs	2	0.9	2	1.1	3	1.8
Other	11	5.0	16	9.0	7	4.2
Total Respondents	218	100.2	177	100.3	165	99.5

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