PROFESSIONAL LEARNING IN STUDENT AFFAIRS GRADUATE PREPARATION

By

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ABSTRACT

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Student affairs work requires the complex interplay of specialized knowledge and skills within a rapidly changing context. Although the profession has increasingly relied on graduate training programs to provide new practitioners with foundation in these knowledge and skills, perennial concerns arise regarding the preparation and effectiveness of recent graduates. Whereas previous literature has examined graduate preparation as a socialization process, by which individuals adjust to new organizational contexts and construct professional identity, I center the learning that occurs within and between coursework and fieldwork contexts. Specifically, I wanted to explore how learning was distributed across and mediated by multiple learning environments; the tools students accessed, used, and adapted during their graduate training; and the tensions within and across learning environments that spurred student transformation.

In order to answer these questions, I conducted a qualitative case study and activity system analysis of four students enrolled in the Student Affairs Preparation (SAP) program (pseudonym), a Master's-level graduate training program at Brady University (pseudonym). I conducted semi-structured interviews with each of the participants during the fall and spring semesters of their second year in the SAP program. These conversations focused on students' learning and experiences in coursework contexts, in fieldwork contexts, and between these two environments. Participants also provided supplemental written materials (e.g., reflection papers, course assignments) that demonstrated their learning throughout their graduate training.

Analysis of the data revealed that, although learning occurred in both fieldwork and coursework contexts, students' experiences in fieldwork greatly mediated how they responded to and made meaning of content from their coursework. Indeed, students used their fieldwork experiences and messages from their fieldwork supervisors to determine the nature of student affairs work and, consequently, the utility of particular knowledge and skills for doing that work. Students sought out, used, and adapted those tools—conceptual and material—immediately applicable to their current work or the work they envisioned doing after graduation. Additionally, students spoke to a variety of tensions within and across learning environments requiring them to think differently about the nature of their own professional practice or the nature of the student affairs profession.

To John Mendoza Brodeur,
the first student affairs educator to show me the high country of the mind

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In studying the professional trajectories of these four students, I found myself frequently reflecting on my own journey through higher education and student affairs—at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Miami University, Michigan State University, and, now, the University of Dayton. I am thankful for the good company I had at each stage in this journey and for the educators who have helped me see who I am and who I aspire to be. Julia, John, Julie, Kate, Sherri, Aaron, Susan, Gwen, Stephen, Elisa, Mahauganee, Amy, Tessa, Patricia, Michelle, and Michele: you have been instrumental in shaping me and the work I do.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Several years into my doctoral program, I was on the phone with two friends from my Master's program cohort who were both entering their third year of post-graduate student affairs work. In the hectic season of student move-ins, convocations, and welcome events, our conversation inevitably turned to the trials and tribulations of their professional lives.

Katelyn worked as an assistant director of student activities at a small engineering college. Her unit had recently hired a second assistant director to fill a position vacant for almost the entirety of Katelyn's tenure at the institution. "He needs his hand held for everything," she bemoaned of her new colleague, a recent graduate of a well-renowned graduate preparation program, "And if he doesn't know how to do something, he just avoids it. There's no attempt to problem-solve, no attempt to be entrepreneurial." Although the new assistant director was friendly and has built good rapport with both students and staff, he still had much to learn in order to effectively operate in his new role.

Samantha served as a residence director at a selective liberal arts college. Due to unit reorganization and several new hires, Samantha now reports to someone who for the past two years worked alongside her as a fellow residence director. "I feel like I'm walking on eggshells every time I try to give my input. It's like she sees every critique I make as some conspiracy to undermine her authority. I just want to do my job well," she sighed. Samantha positions student learning at the heart of her work, but her professional decision-making rarely occurs in isolation. As she acts to engage residents in personal and community development, she must also negotiate how others interpret her actions and how those interpretations influence key work relationships.

These stories and the professional challenges they describe are not unique. Student affairs educators routinely face problems requiring them to think in complex ways, interact with diverse

people, and translate specialized knowledge and skills into practical action. Three years removed from their graduate training, Katelyn and Samantha still encountered difficult situations that pushed the boundaries of their professional expertise. Although graduate training is by no means a silver bullet—as it is practically impossible to avoid every "graduate school didn't prepare me for this" moment—student affairs educators require the best preparation possible for succeeding in their work. Graduate preparation programs must, at their core, serve as spaces in which students engage in meaningful, transformative, and lasting professional learning. In the face of rapid changes within postsecondary education and high rates of attrition from the field, the student affairs profession needs a better and more multidimensional perspective on the professional learning that occurs in graduate preparation programs. Such a perspective can help preparation programs train individuals for navigating the many and complex challenges that will inevitably arise in their work.

The Necessity and Complexity of Student Affairs Work

Scholars of United States-based postsecondary education have long affirmed college student learning occurs in both in-classroom and out-of-classroom contexts (Kuh, 1995; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Witt, 2010; Mayhew, Rockenbach, Bowman, Seifert, & Wolniak, 2016; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005). The recognition of cocurricular learning and its influences on student success serves to validate the work of student affairs educators, who create and maintain cocurricular learning environments (American College Personnel Association [ACPA] & National Association of Student Personnel Administrators [NASPA], 2004; ACPA et al., 2006; Blimling & Whitt, 1999). Indeed, scholars have demonstrated engagement in the learning environments student affairs educators routinely oversee (e.g., first-year experience programs, residential learning communities, student organizations, and service-learning programs) is

associated with a diverse array of positive student learning outcomes such as first-year retention (Ben-Avie et al., 2012; Nelson, Quinn, Marrington, & Clarke, 2012; Nigro & Farnsworth, 2009), higher grade point average (Ben-Avie et al., 2012; Jamelske, 2009), civic engagement (Bowman, Park, & Denson, 2015; Hébert & Hauf, 2015; Mayhew & Engberg, 2011), intellectual development (Hébert & Hauf, 2015; Inkelas et al., 2006), and appreciation for issues of social justice (Eyler & Giles, 2001; Harper & Quaye, 2007). Furthermore, direct contact with student affairs educators positively influences students' academic motivation (Martin & Seifert, 2011; Martin, Takewell, & Miller, 2014), need for cognition and curiosity (Martin & Seifert, 2011; Martin, Takewell, & Miller, 2014), and socially responsible leadership development (Martin, 2013). Through their work, student affairs educators have the opportunity to work with students at a critical juncture in their personal development and to shape environments that support student success in college and beyond.

Although student affairs work may be necessary in supporting student learning and success, such work involves multiple layers of complexity. As argued in *Learning Reconsidered: A Campus-Wide Focus on the Student Experience* (ACPA & NAPSA, 2004), student affairs educators "have broad roles, both conceptually and practically" (p. 24) and leverage a variety of cognitive, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and practical skills in their daily practice. The authors of that report noted the need for student affairs educators to utilize highly specialized knowledge about postsecondary institutions and students. Student affairs educators must also possess a sense of agency in pursuing their work and establishing collaborative partnerships, multicultural sensitivity in interacting with student and staff populations, and leadership skills for navigating change and resolving conflict. These dimensions of student affairs work exist within and are influenced by broader trends in postsecondary education, such as the increasing diversification of

student demographics, emergence of new technologies and modes of knowledge production, and reorganization of traditional administrative structures. Student affairs educators, then, are expected to know and do much in effectively serving students.

The narratives presented at the outset of this chapter, in similar and unique ways, illustrate the inherent complexities of student affairs work. In Katelyn's story, the new assistant director appears to lack that sense of agency. Unable to independently tackle the many problems—small and large—that arise in the course of daily professional life, he simply shuts down and avoids the work. Although he is building collegial relationships with the other practitioners in his unit, he has yet to leverage those interpersonal relationships in order to learn more about his institutional context, build collaborative partnerships, or improve in his work. In response to her new colleague, Katelyn is also faced with a new set of leadership challenges as she maintains her own professional duties while adjusting to new interpersonal dynamics within the unit. Samantha is similarly in the process of recalibrating to the new political landscape formed by her unit's reorganization. As she seeks to enact her unit's mission and goals for residential education, her new supervisor's need to be seen as a competent authority figure increasingly mediates how Samantha approaches her daily work. Samantha, therefore, must think carefully about how to cultivate a healthy relationship with her new supervisor while simultaneously advocating for her students. Such a task will require Samantha to clarify her professional values and utilize complex interpersonal skills. Although both Katelyn and Samantha are encountering new professional challenges, they can leverage some of the knowledge and skills they developed during their graduate training in order to analyze and address their respective issues.

The Role of Student Affairs Graduate Preparation

The student affairs profession has increasingly relied on graduate preparation programs as a primary site for training future practitioners and steering their entry into full-time work (Hirschy, Wilson, Liddell, Boyle, & Pasquesi, 2015; Kuk & Cuyjet, 2009; Young & Janosik, 2007). As Creamer, Janosik, Winston, and Kuk (2001) asserted, graduate preparation programs serve as a first step in introducing new educators to the knowledge, skills, and values of the student affairs profession. Other scholars have positioned graduate preparation as an important space for building professional identity, the internalization of professional norms and skills into one's self-image (Liddell, Wilson, Pasquesi, Hirschy, & Boyle, 2014; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008). Graduate preparation—with its dual focus on academic coursework (providing theoretical and content knowledge) and professional fieldwork (providing concrete experience and practical skills)—provides the foundation for students to succeed in future professional contexts (Kuk & Hughes, 2003; Winston & Creamer, 1997). As popularly conceptualized in the current literature, graduate training serves as a bridge guiding students from being unskilled, uninitiated novices to being more skilled members of the profession.

Although scholars have recognized the importance of graduate preparation for practitioners' future career success and persistence and have worked to design effective programs, they have also highlighted breakdowns between new practitioners' graduate preparation and the demands of their future jobs. Whereas recent graduates enter their new roles confident in their preparation and professional competence (Cuyjet, Longwell-Grice, & Molina, 2009; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008), their supervisors offer more tempered appraisals of their preparation (Cuyjet et al., 2009; Dickerson et al., 2011; Herdlein, 2004). Scholars suggest new student affairs educators leave graduate preparation with strong knowledge of student

development theory and commitment to working with diverse populations but often lack the administrative skills—budgeting, understanding law and policy, working with new technologies, and navigating institutional bureaucracy—their employers prioritize (Cooper, Mitchell, Eckerle, & Martin, 2016; Dickerson et al., 2011; Herdlein, 2004). The literature characterizes this disjuncture as new practitioners *knowing about* the work but falling short in *knowing how* to do the work (Cooper et al., 2016). Such concerns about the effectiveness of graduate preparation programs and the practitioners who graduate from these programs invites further interrogation into how the profession conceptualizes graduate training and the core processes and assumptions perpetuated through this popular discourse.

Student Affairs Graduate Preparation as Socialization

Scholarly and professional discussion of student affairs graduate preparation is rooted overwhelmingly within the framework of socialization. Socialization, as a theoretical framework, offers an organizational perspective on the processes by which individuals transition and are integrated into new workplace cultures (Van Maanen & Schein, 1977). During socialization, the emerging professional "acquires the social knowledge and skills necessary to assume an organizational role" (p. 3). In other words, through socialization, emerging professionals come to know how to exist within the organization. They develop "a cultural perspective that can be brought to bear on both commonplace and unusual matters going on in the workplace" (p. 4). Over time, emerging professionals move from outsider and insider and construct an integrated professional identity (Thornton & Nardi, 1975). Socialization in graduate school, as Weidman, Twale, and Stein (2001) defined, is "the proces[s] through which individuals gain the knowledge, skill, and values necessary for successful entry into a professional career requiring an advanced

level of specialized knowledge and skill" (p. iii). Such a process "requires changes in students' self-images, attitudes, and thinking processes" (Egan, 1989, p. 210).

Scholars have described socialization as the "core attribute" of student affairs graduate preparation (Kuk & Cuyjet, 2009, p. 91). Through graduate preparation programs, future practitioners are acculturated to the values and practices of the profession and acquire the knowledge and skills to successfully transition into the new organizational cultures of their full-time employment site. The literature associates successful socialization via graduate preparation with strengthened professional identity (Liddell et al., 2014; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008), enhanced knowledge and skill (Kuk & Cuyjet, 2009; Young & Janosik, 2007), and persistence in the field (Tull, 2006). In contrast, new student affairs educators who are not properly socialized during graduate preparation may experience job dissatisfaction (Tull, 2006), question their fit for the field (Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008), or actively leave the field (Cilente, Henning, Jackson, Kennedy, & Sloane, 2006; Richmond & Sherman, 1991; Tull, 2009).

Within the framework of socialization, student affairs graduate preparation and the transition from graduate school to full-time employment is largely a story of acquiring "stuff"—knowledge, skills, values, norms, and attitudes. Although some have argued professional socialization involves the mutual transformation of both the individual and the organization (Perez, 2016a, 2016b; Tierney, 1997), this point appears lost in much of the discourse on socialization to student affairs work. As framed in the literature, new graduate students are blank slates, uninitiated to the values, norms, and knowledge of the student affairs profession. Through graduate preparation, students acquire these values, norms, and knowledge by engaging in academic and professional experiences. As they transition to full-time work, new student affairs

educators either arrive to their new roles with the right "stuff" to succeed (i.e., successful socialization) or arrive without some of this "stuff" (i.e., unsuccessful socialization).

Consider, then, how the framework of socialization explains the narratives presented at the outset of this chapter. In the first story, Katelyn's co-worker has arrived to his new role without some of the "stuff" he should have acquired in graduate school, namely problem-solving skills and capacity for self-direction. Now he is unable to fulfill his work responsibilities and is increasingly in crisis. Two outcomes, from a socialization perspective, are most likely. Either he will leave the position because his lack of skills prevent him from fully integrating into the unit or other colleagues within the unit will take on the responsibility of transferring the requisite knowledge and skills to him. In the second story, Samantha has experienced a shift in her unit's organizational culture due to restructuring. Within a socialization framework, she similarly faces two outcomes depending on the "stuff" she acquired through her training—use the requisite knowledge and skills to adapt to the new culture or exit the organization. Whether she has the right "stuff" to navigate the transition remains to be seen.

Scholarship utilizing a socialization framework to understand preparation for student affairs work can offer important insight into how new practitioners construct a professional identity and navigate new organizational cultures. However, it is not wholly satisfactory in understanding the intricacies of how individuals develop and sustain a complex professional practice. In the first narrative, told from a socialization perspective, Katelyn's co-worker has practically no agency in improving his practice. His professional skills, or lack thereof, are simply the by-product of outside forces (e.g., supervisors, colleagues) acting upon him. Given the need for student affairs educators who can think and act in independently (ACPA & NASPA, 2004), a framework that deemphasizes individuals' agency in their own professional

development is ultimately not satisfactory. A socialization perspective on Samantha's narrative certainly accentuates important questions regarding adaptation to new cultures and power dynamics. However, in order to navigate these new dynamics, Samantha needs to leverage certain intrapersonal and interpersonal skills. Whereas a socialization perspective can highlight whether or not Samantha has these skills, the "stuff" she ideally acquired during graduate training, it cannot fully detail how she developed these skills. In order to better understand how new practitioners learn to do complex and necessary student affairs work, the profession needs scholarship that can ask new questions about the nature and processes of graduate training. In the following section, I lay out the particular limitations of a socialization framework for understanding student affairs graduate preparation and offer alternative theoretical approaches for addressing these limitations.

Limitations of a Socialization Framework

Despite the uncontested dominance of a socialization framework in student affairs scholarship, this framework is insufficient for conceptualizing how graduate students learn to be effective educators during their graduate training and how graduate programs prepare students to make the transition from graduate training to full-time work. In order to address concerns about the readiness of new practitioners (Cooper et al., 2016; Cuyjet et al., 2009; Herdlein, 2004) and their frequent attrition from the field (Lorden, 1998; Tull, 2006), the profession needs to look beyond the socialization of these individuals and instead consider how they learn to do complex work. In the past several decades, the student affairs profession has focused its mission around promoting student learning (e.g., ACPA, 1996; ACPA & NASPA, 2004; ACPA et al., 2006). This invocation to understand and be integrally involved in college students' learning came with corollary demands—for student affairs educators to broaden perspective on their own learning

and for preparation programs to promote the same learning outcomes for their graduates the profession espouses for undergraduate education (ACPA & NASPA, 2004; ACPA et al., 2006; Magolda & Carnaghi, 2017). Over a decade later, issues of professional learning for student affairs educators remain under theorized and frameworks explicitly utilizing learning theories remain scant in the literature. Such frameworks, however, are perfectly suited for enriching understanding of graduate preparation and complementing the theoretical limitations of the socialization framework that currently dominates student affairs scholarship (Perez, Harris, Montgomery, & Robbins, 2017).

A socialization framework relies on increasingly outdated assumptions regarding the nature of learners and learning. Socialization scholars frame the knowledge, skills, and dispositions individuals need to succeed in a new organizational context as separate entities individuals come to possess through acquisition and indoctrination (Van Maanen & Schein, 1977; Weidman et al., 2001). This framing of knowledge and skills as separate from and outside of the individual likewise appears in student affairs socialization literature (e.g., Collins, 2009; Kuk & Cuyjet, 2009; Liddell et al., 2014). Only recently (e.g., Perez, 2016a, 2016b) have student affairs scholars begun to question such a division by thinking about the cognitive dimensions and meaning-making processes involved in socialization experiences. Nevertheless, discourse on socialization for student affairs work remains entrenched in the notion professional preparation involves collecting, acquiring, or adding specialized knowledge and skills.

Although this additive view of learning has a long history in educational practice and research, more recent scholars of adult learning have routinely and vehemently questioned the "representation of knowledge as a substantive thing antedating the learning individual" (Fenwick & Tennant, 2004, p. 60). In response to the additive view of learning, scholars have offered a

range of learning theories that—though distinct in their assumptions about and framing of learners and the learning process—cohere around the notion learners and knowledge are more intimately connected than previously envisaged (Fenwick & Tennant, 2004; MacKeracher, 2004; Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Sociocultural learning theories, in particular, frame knowledge not as an entity separate from the individual but as the result of co-construction between individuals and their environments (Engeström, 1987; Fenwick & Tennant, 2004; Vygotsky, 1978). Learning is ultimately an interdependent process involving complex networks of human activity and negotiations between individuals and their social environments. Thus, a sociocultural learning perspective on student affairs graduate preparation can look beyond the overly simplistic learning-as-acquisition model inherent in a socialization framework and offer a richer understanding of how graduate students learn to do student affairs work.

Discussion of socialization to and preparation for student affairs work also ignores or significantly underplays the role of context in shaping professional knowledge and expertise. For example, ACPA and NASPA, the two largest student affairs professional associations, co-authored (2010, 2015) a set of professional competencies designed, in part, to guide the content of graduate preparation. These competencies detail "essential knowledge, skills, and dispositions expected of all student affairs educators, regardless of functional area or specialization within the field" (ACPA & NASPA, 2015, p. 7). The authors argue application of these competencies "must be mindful of the unique missions, contexts, and needs of various colleges, universities, and professional associations" (p. 10). The authors situated context as separate from professional competencies. Context serves as a possible lens through which student affairs educators interpret the practice and implementation of the knowledge, skills, and dispositions they have already acquired. Student affairs scholarship that attempts to explore the role of context in socialization

offers a limited definition of context. Hirt (2009) and Freeman and Taylor (2009), notably, define context solely in terms of institutional type (e.g., liberal arts college, community college) and student characteristics (e.g., age, race) respectively.

As sociocultural learning scholars have long contended, however, learning and knowledge are situated within physical and social contexts (Hansman, 2001; Vygotsky, 1978) and fundamentally involve lived practices rather than the accumulation of information (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). Context is not subsequent to professional learning, something for the practitioner to consider after the fact, but rather an integral factor in shaping learning processes and the nature of knowledge. Scholars, furthermore, have argued context is not defined by simple descriptors (Niewolny & Wilson, 2009) but instead involves expansive networks of social, cultural, and historical actors and mediations (Lattuca, 2002; Lave, 1988; Neumann, 2005; Zukas, 2006). Whereas scholarship on graduate preparation rooted in a socialization framework cannot fully tease out the role of context in shaping graduate training, scholarship utilizing a sociocultural learning perspective is better positioned to map out and analyze the environments in which individuals learn to do student affairs work.

Any theoretical framework highlights certain constructs and phenomena while simultaneously deemphasizing others (Abes, 2009). Although this point in itself is relatively innocuous, danger arises when over-reliance on a particular framework or paradigm blinds scholars from challenging the limitations of their assumptions and reconceiving old problems in new ways (Lather, 2006). Scholarship on student affairs graduate preparation, firmly fixed in a socialization framework, is in risk of such danger. In light of perennial concerns regarding the preparedness of new practitioners and their attrition from the field, scholarship rooted in socialization may be asking the wrong questions about training individuals to do complex work.

Instead, sociocultural learning theories provide a path toward a new line of scholarship, one that heeds the call for attention to student affairs educators' own learning (e.g., ACPA & NASPA, 2004; ACPA et al., 2006) and realigns student affairs scholarship and practice with relevant developments in adult learning theory (e.g., Fenwick & Tennant, 2004).

Overview of the Study

Previous scholarship exploring the preparation and training of graduate students for full-time student affairs work has relied almost exclusively on a framework of socialization (e.g., Hirschy et al., 2015; Kuk & Cuyjet, 2009; Liddell et al., 2014; Perez, 2016a, 2016b; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008). Persistent concerns about the inadequate preparation of new practitioners (Cooper et al., 2016; Cuyjet et al., 2009; Dickerson et al., 2011; Herdlein, 2004) and their high attrition rate (Lorden, 1998; Tull, 2006) suggest this theoretical perspective alone cannot address the complexities of professional preparation. Whereas a socialization framework is suited toward questions of professional identity and organizational politics, scholarship explicitly grounded in a sociocultural learning perspective can ask new questions about how individuals learn to do student affairs work and how preparation programs function as learning environments. Answers to these questions can strengthen the quality of graduate training and ensure new practitioners enter the field equipped to navigate the complex nature of student affairs work. The purpose of this study, then, is to leverage a sociocultural learning perspective in better understanding how Master's students learn the complex array of knowledge and skills involved in student affairs work during their graduate training.

A sociocultural perspective on learning encompasses a variety of individual theories, each with their own emphases and assumptions (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). In order to clarify my focus, I situate this study within cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT), a particular

sociocultural learning theory that describes human learning as the process by which individuals transform themselves and their environments through participation in ongoing activity (Engeström, 1987). Whereas other learning theories (e.g., Dirkx, 2012; Mezirow, 1991) describe transformation in very particular terms, CHAT theorists use the language of transformation in a more general sense to describe any degree of change—large or small—in individuals' behavior and cognition and in their sociocultural environments.

As I elaborate on in the following chapter, CHAT emerges from the work of Vygotsky (1978), one of the first scholars to emphasize the developmental relationship between humans and their environments. Vygotsky (1978) explored how individuals engage in learning through mediated action (accessing, using, and adapting tools in order to pursue certain goals). Later CHAT scholars (e.g., Engeström, 1987) focused on fleshing out the dimensions of the environments (referred to as activity systems) in which mediated action occurs and the contradictions (disturbances, dilemmas, and disruptions) that provoke transformations within individuals and their environments. CHAT is a useful framework for this study because it provides rich tools both theoretically and methodologically for analyzing learners and learning environments. Furthermore, CHAT—which eschews an additive perspective on learning and provides a comprehensive understanding of context—directly addresses the limitations of the socialization framework that dominates current scholarship on graduate preparation.

Recognizing the need for scholarship challenging current conceptualizations of student affairs graduate preparation and the process by which individuals train to work in this field, I center my study on the professional learning that occurs during graduate preparation. Leveraging CHAT, I reframe graduate preparation for the field not as the acquisition of knowledge and skills but rather as the deeply contextualized and dynamic process of participation in interconnected

networks of activities. Scholarship focused on graduate students' learning, rather than their socialization, can offer insight into how new practitioners develop a professional practice that enables them to navigate student affairs work and the role of preparation programs in shaping their capacity to think and act in complex ways. Such insights can help the profession train and retain skilled educators for doing important work on behalf of postsecondary students.

Research Purpose and Questions

The purpose of this study is to explore how students enrolled in Master's-level student affairs preparation programs in the United States learn to do student affairs work and the ways in which this professional learning is located within, distributed across, and mediated by a particular learning environment. Recognizing the need for scholarship that problematizes current conceptions of graduate preparation for student affairs work, I pose the central question: *How do students in a Master's-level student affairs program learn to do student affairs work during their graduate preparation?* Situated within this question are several sub-questions underscoring my use of CHAT as a framework for conceptualizing human learning:

(a) How is students' professional learning distributed across and mediated by multiple activity systems?

(b) How do students access, use, and adapt the tools embedded in their specific activity systems during their graduate training?

(c) How do contradictions that emerge within the activity systems of graduate training transform students' professional practice?

Contributions of the Study

In utilizing CHAT as an alternative lens for understanding graduate preparation and the ways in which students learn to do complex work, this study represents a fundamental shift in the

scholarly discourse on student affairs preparation. Inquiry into student affairs graduate preparation utilizing a sociocultural learning perspective promises new insights into how individuals learn to do student affairs work and how the learning environments that comprise graduate training (e.g., academic coursework and supervised fieldwork contexts) shape this learning process. Specifically, a sociocultural approach to graduate preparation challenges the dominant assumptions of learning as an additive, person-centered process divorced from the contexts and communities in which the person operates. Thus, this study provides depth and complexity to scholarly theorizing about preparing individuals to do student affairs work.

This study also contributes to a limited yet growing body of research that seeks to complicate and reimagine issues of professional learning (e.g., Fenwick, 2010; Fenwick & Nerland, 2014; Sawchuk, Duarte, & Elhammoumi, 2005). Conditions for work practice are dramatically changing in response to new modes of knowledge production and the increasing distribution of work across organizational and geographic boundaries (Fenwick & Nerland, 2014). Therefore, traditional models of professional learning—which center individual cognition with little regard for the material, social, and cultural dimensions of learning—possess diminishing utility. Student affairs graduate preparation serves as a particularly interesting site for investigating professional learning because of the multiple and interconnected contexts in which graduate students learn (i.e., coursework and fieldwork contexts). Although sociocultural learning theories stress learning occurs at all times and in all contexts (Fenwick & Tennant, 2004; Roth & Lee, 2007; Wells & Claxton, 2002), limited empirical work explores how professional learning may transcend and complicate traditional notions of self-contained learning environments, such as “classroom learning” or “learning on the job. New scholarship on professional learning in student affairs graduate preparation may reveal how students leverage

and negotiate multiple learning networks as synthetic, interdependent activities rather than as discrete experiences.

Finally, findings regarding how individuals learn to do student affairs work during their graduate training may provide insights for strengthening graduate preparation programs and supporting students' transition to full-time practice. Given the high attrition rate of new educators from the field and the associated costs of continually allocating organizational resources for hiring and training new professionals (Lorden, 1998; Tull, 2006), the profession has a stake in ensuring new practitioners leave graduate programs prepared for complex work (Magolda & Carnaghi, 2017). Findings from this study may help individuals—such as program faculty members and fieldwork supervisors—create organizational or pedagogical structures that better assist graduate students in developing the capacities needed to effectively navigate student affairs work.

Organization of the Dissertation

In this chapter, I explained a central tension for the student affairs profession—student affairs work is critical to the success of postsecondary students but difficult for individuals, especially new practitioners, to enact and sustain. I argued concerns about the preparedness of new practitioners stem from the profession's limited perspective on the purpose and priorities of graduate training and offered sociocultural learning, specifically CHAT, as an alternative framework for understanding how individuals learn to do complex work. I concluded with the specific research questions guiding this study.

In Chapter II, I review literature that will aid the reader in understanding the proliferation of graduate professional education in the United States and student affairs preparation programs as a particular example of this trend. I also provide a more extensive overview of CHAT and the

conceptual model guiding this study. Chapter III details the methodology and the methods I used in pursuing my research questions. Chapter IV provides findings from my data by introducing activity system maps for each of the study's participants, identifying how students used sociocultural tools throughout their graduate training, and exploring levels of contradictions that manifested throughout graduate training. Chapter V offers discussion on my study's findings and implications for both research and practice.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I review the literature informing this study. I begin with a brief history of and important trends in Master's-level education in the United States. I then focus on Master's-level professional education, which accounts for the vast majority of contemporary Master's-level programs and conferred degrees, with special attention to the core issues scholars have addressed in research on such programs. Next, I explore the existing scholarship on student affairs graduate preparation—the particular context for my study—and its role in training new student affairs educators for working in the field. I then present the evolution and major constructs of cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT), the theoretical framework guiding this study. I conclude by presenting my conceptual model and revisiting my research questions in order to consider how the current literature informs these particular questions.

Master's-Level Education

Harvard College conferred the first Master's degree in the United States in the mid-seventeenth century, and other colleges began offering the degree as they were founded (Brubacher & Rudy, 1976; Rudolph, 1962). Adopting the model of their British predecessors, Oxford and Cambridge, the early American colleges granted Master's degrees to students who completed an additional one to three years of study after their undergraduate programs. Those who completed the degree often took on teaching positions upon graduation. As the highest degree offered during the colonial era, a Master's degree garnered significant public respect and was seen as a "rigorous academic achievement" (Pelczar, 1979, p. 117). By the early nineteenth century, however, the Master's degree lost much of its status as many institutions began to grant the degree "in course," meaning they would award it to any baccalaureate graduate willing to wait several years and pay a diploma fee (Conrad, Haworth, & Millar, 1993; Mayville, 1972).

Despite several institutions' attempts to reinstate the Master's degree as a rigorous achievement, the public esteem of the degree did not begin to rise once more until the University of Michigan conferred its first "earned" Master's degree in 1859 (Eells, 1963).

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, the resurrection of the Master's degree paralleled the increasing presence of the university and graduate education in United States postsecondary education (Veysey, 1965). In response to growing dissatisfaction with the classical curriculum, the need for a trained populace to support the industrial revolution, and increased interest in the German model of advanced study, both the number of universities and the number of conferred Master's degrees in the United States began to steadily rise. For example, the number of conferred Master's degrees grew from 879 to 1,500 between 1880 and 1900 (Association of American Universities [AAU], 1945). Snell (1965) put forth two explanations for the resurgence of the Master's degree during this period. First, the increasing popularity of the Ph.D. degree encouraged some institutions to increase their Master's-level offerings as pathways toward and complements to doctoral studies. Second, earned doctorates did not meet the demands for college and university teachers, and many positions required only a Master's degree in the liberal arts and sciences. By the end of the nineteenth century, the Master's degree was defined primarily as scholarly degree in the liberal arts in sciences, intended for future college teachers, and involving several years of post-baccalaureate study and completion of a thesis (Brubacher & Rudy, 1976; Snell, 1965).

The Master's degree continued to evolve throughout the twentieth century, especially in response to transformations in the post-World War II American workforce (Conrad et al., 1993). For example, new certification and promotion policies in elementary and secondary schools encouraged teachers and administrators to pursue graduate studies. Furthermore, businesses and

governments demanded graduates with advanced specialized training. These changes provoked even greater growth in the number of Master's degrees conferred annually and the number of institutions offering Master's-level programs. As Snell (1965) illustrated, the number of Master's degrees conferred annually roughly tripled (from 27,000 to 80,000) and the number of institutions offering Master's-level programs doubled (from 300 to 621) between 1940 and 1960. Importantly, this time period also witnessed the "professionalization" of the Master's degree (Conrad et al., 1993). Although the number of Master's degrees in the liberal arts and sciences rose steadily—largely because most Ph.D. programs required them for entry—enrollment in professional fields such as education and business far outpaced this growth (Snell, 1965). Additionally, institutions created new Master's-level programs in a number of fields and subfields, with the vast majority of these in professional disciplines. By the late twentieth century, the Master's degree no longer served solely as a path to college teaching in the liberal arts and sciences but instead served a range of purposes across a growing number of disciplines.

Current trends in Master's-level education in the United States extend upon the expansion and professionalization themes that emerged in the late twentieth century. The number of Master's degrees conferred each year have steadily grown and exceeded 750,000 in the 2014-2015 academic year (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2016b). Professional disciplines represent the vast majority of earned Master's degrees. Indeed, three professional disciplines—business (24%), education (19%), and health professions (14%)—accounted for over half of the Master's degrees conferred in the 2014-2015 academic year. By contrast, disciplines traditionally associated with the liberal arts and sciences—such as English language and literature (1%), mathematics (1%), and history (3%)—accounted for a much smaller portion of conferred Master's degrees in the same year. The current proliferation of awarded Master's

degrees in professional fields corresponds to the ongoing shift toward a knowledge-based economy, which favors more educated workers who "are asked to *think* rather than *produce* in the traditional manner of manufacturing industries of the past [italics in the original]" (Commission on the Future of Graduate Education in the United States, 2010, p. 17). Over half of new jobs projected in the next decade will be in professional and service sectors, which increasingly require graduate-level education. Market demand serves as a powerful contemporary force, therefore, in shaping the growth of Master's-level education and concentrating that growth within particular disciplines.

Despite the steady proliferation of graduate programs and degrees over the last century, graduate education—especially Master's-level education—remains underrepresented in scholarly literature (Council of Graduate Students, 2009; Gardner & Barker, 2014). Most scholarship on postsecondary students centers the needs and experiences of undergraduate students. As Gardner and Barker (2014) argued, postsecondary institutions have largely passed over the needs and experiences of graduate students because they believe such students to be prepared for the academic and interpersonal rigors of graduate education by virtue of strong undergraduate performance. The relatively small body of work devoted to graduate students centers almost exclusively on doctoral students. Even work that uses the language of "graduate school" and "graduate students" in fact relies solely on data collected from doctoral students (e.g., Anderson & Swazey, 1998; Austin, 2002; Gardner & Barker, 2014). Conflating graduate education with doctoral education, however, ignores the fact doctoral students make up a narrow portion of American graduate students. Indeed, only 19% of graduate degrees granted in the United States during the 2013-2014 academic year were doctoral degrees (NCES, 2016a). Master's programs conferred the remaining degrees. Furthermore, Master's and doctoral education possess largely

different structures and serve largely different purposes (Conrad et al., 1993). Whereas doctoral programs typically involve four to eight years of study and emphasize training in research and scholarly activity, Master's programs typically involve one or two years of study and predominantly prepare individuals for specialized professional work. Therefore, postsecondary education literature would benefit from scholarship that specifically highlights the experiences of Master's students during their graduate training.

Master's-Level Professional Education

Ongoing transformations in the American workforce post-World War II contributed to the proliferation of professionally oriented Master's programs (Conrad et al., 1993). Throughout the twenty-first century, many professions—some more formally, some more informally—have increasingly utilized Master's-level education as a gatekeeper to working in the field. Several professions, including social work, counseling, and accounting, require or strongly encourage individuals to possess a relevant Master's degree in order to earn their certification and legally practice (American Institute of Certified Public Accountants, 2016; National Association of Social Workers, 2017; National Board for Certified Counselors, 2017). Indeed, economists project jobs requiring a Master's degree will have increased by 18% between 2008 and 2018 (Commission on the Future of Graduate Education in the United States, 2010). In some professions, such as student affairs, a Master's degree, although not mandated at a profession-wide level, has become a *de facto* requirement for most employment opportunities (Hoffman & Bresciani, 2012). For other professions, such as teaching and business, Master's-level education creates opportunities for career benefits including promotion and increased earning potential (National Council on Teacher Quality, 2013; Yeaple, Johnston, & Whittingham, 2010). Ultimately, Master's-level professional programs serve to meet the aforementioned market

demands for highly skilled, highly specialized workers (Commission on the Future of Graduate Education in the United States, 2010). In response, scholarship on Master's-level professional education focuses heavily on defining the nature of highly skilled work—often framed within a competency-based approach—and examining the outcomes of professional education in preparing students for such work.

Professional Competencies

Graduate professional programs exist to support students in building "specialized competence, acquired as the result of intellectual training" (Carr-Saunders & Wilson, 1933, p. 207) as they transition to their field of work. As Sun (2004) articulated, graduate professional programs "inculcate knowledge of the theory and practice so that the candidates of the profession are sufficiently competent for practice in the respective field" (p. 6). Competency, then, is central to current scholarship on professional graduate education. Competency serves as a popular guidepost for the outcomes of professional graduate education because it suggests expertise individuals can leverage in a specific field and employment context (Bilder & Conrad, 1996). Increasingly, professional associations have taken the lead in identifying the specific competencies new professionals should demonstrate upon completion of their graduate preparation. For example, formal statements of professional competencies exist for social work (National Association of Social Workers, 2017), engineering (American Society of Civil Engineers, 2017; American Society of Mechanical Engineers, n.d.), and college student affairs (ACPA & NASPA, 2010, 2015). Such statements, however, exist within ongoing scholarly

debate as to the nature of professional competency and the role of graduate programs in fostering professional knowledge, traits, and skills.

Identifying professional competencies. Scholars agree competency involves some collection of traits, skills, and knowledge bases (Berdrow & Evers, 2011; Gonczi, 2013; Lovell & Kosten, 2000; McEvoy et al., 2005; Parsons, 1977; Vorhees, 2001). They have not reached consensus, however, on the exact ways in which these traits, skills, and knowledge bases interact with one another and how competency manifest in professional contexts. Some scholars have articulated a clear distinction between general and specific competencies while others have argued such a distinction is inauthentic. For example, Berdrow and Evers (2011) detailed a bases of competence model for graduates of professional education programs. Their model identified managing self, communication, managing people and tasks, and mobilizing innovation and change as base competencies but also included more specific competencies within each of these bases. Gonczi (2013), however, put forth a relational approach to conceptualizing competency that counters the notion of distinct and tiered competencies. Rather than positioning some competencies as more specific or more foundational than others, he argued competencies always involve an interplay between general capacities and contextual knowledge. As such, from the relational approach, competencies are never discrete but rather fundamentally interconnected.

Scholarly discussion of professional competency often highlights a split between knowledge and application. Parsons (1977) and Berdrow and Evers (2011) argued professional competency consists of not only knowing a tool but also knowing how to use that tool appropriately. Likewise, the Carnegie Foundation's Preparation for the Professions Program (Sullivan, 2007) distinguished between analytic thinking, wise judgment, and skillful practice competencies. As Gonczi (2013) explained, the division between knowledge and application has

a long history in educational research and, more generally, Western thought. Such a division emerged in the work of Aristotle and continued through that of Socrates and Descartes. Gonczi's (2013) relational approach to conceptualizing professional competency, however, builds on the later work of Dewey and Kolb in challenging the division between knowledge and application. His approach frames competency as a "holistic process of pattern recognition" (p. 1300) that bridges the gap between "knowing that" and "knowing how."

Scholars have routinely suggested professional competency manifests in and is evaluated through behavior. For example, McEvoy et al. (2005) described professional competency as the skilled behavior that emerges from the integration of knowledge, skills, motives, and traits. Furthermore, they argued competencies can only be assessed through observing behavior. Weatherman and Wolf (1977) likewise positioned competencies as performances or observable behaviors. In contrast, Gonczi (2013) argued "competency [is] inferred from performance and [is] not directly observable. While the performance of activities and tasks can be observed, the attributes that underline the performance are necessarily inferred" (p. 1291). He saw the need for a framework that broadened the conception of professional competency and made room for new ways of understanding and assessing an individual's competency.

Professional competencies in the curriculum. In response to the proliferation of competencies across professional disciplines and the increased support for competency-based education, graduate professional programs have begun to reevaluate and retool their curricular offerings. Whereas earlier scholarship on competency-based professional education focused on merely revising course content (Selby, 1979), more recent scholars have argued adopting a true competency-based model of professional education involves absolute transformation in how educators think about the content and processes of graduate preparation (Golom & Noumair,

2014; Ott, Baca, Cisneros, & Bates, 2014; Sibley & Parmelee, 2008). Golom and Noumair (2014) discussed how a competency-based curriculum for industrial-organizational psychologists invited opportunities for courses centered on integrated themes rather than siloed content areas and for frequent student collaboration. Sibley and Parmelee (2008) echoed the benefits of student collaboration in explaining how team-based learning assignments may nurture professional competency across a variety of professional disciplines. Such scholars rationalize these changes in pedagogical strategies by arguing they allow students to engage in authentic problem-solving, which better prepares them for the real-world challenges of future professional contexts.

The challenge of embedding new and effective assessment methods into the curriculum appears in literature across professional disciplines. As scholars (Baartman, Bastiaens, Kirschner, & van der Vleuten, 2006; Braun, Woodley, Richardson, & Leidner, 2010; Daly III, Doll, Schulte, & Fenning, 2011; Gonczi, 2013) have noted, professional competencies are difficult to conceptualize and even more difficult to evaluate. The literature suggests professional graduate programs have found mixed results in retooling their assessment and evaluation methods to reflect the goals of a competency-based approach. For example, Ott et al. (2014) discussed how a higher education administration program moved to a combination of direct (e.g., papers and portfolios) and indirect (e.g., exit interviews and focus groups) assessment methods in order to more successfully and holistically track students' competency development. Conversely, Daly III et al. (2011) raised concerns regarding the validity of psychometric instruments commonly used to evaluate the base competencies of entering school psychologists. They felt competency-based school psychology curricula had yet to fully meet the promise of better preparing new professionals for the field.

Critiques of a competency-based approach. Although *a* number of professions have increasingly relied on a competency-based approach for describing effective professional practice and shaping graduate training for professional work, some scholars have argued this approach represents limiting ideologies (Barnett, 1994) and rests on several problematic assertions. A competency-based approach to professional practice assumes complex work can be comprehensively defined. As Collins, Burke, Martindale, and Cruickshank (2015) suggested, the apparent comprehensiveness of competency standards often masks over-simplification. Standards for professional competencies in a range of disciplines—from social work to engineering—attempt to articulate exhaustive lists of knowledge, skills, and traits and, as such, are notably lengthy. However, "addressing such an extensive range of attributes is both practically impossible and epistemologically questionable in that practitioners are being trained and assessed in a way that is at odds with their operational environment" (Collins et al., 2015, p. 3). The task of creating a comprehensive and unified definition of professional competencies for specific fields—taken up by scholars and professional associations for decades—may ultimately prove futile because the complexities and nuances of effective practice for skilled professional work cannot be broken down in a discrete number of individual parts.

Furthermore, a competency-based approach to professional practice often generates competencies that "can be viewed as context independent, generic, and apparently applicable across different settings, occupations and tasks" (Collins et al., 2015, p. 3). For example, Talbot (2004) raised concerns with the reliance on competencies within graduate medical training in the United Kingdom. In his review of anesthetics training, he found stated competencies did not account for contextual considerations such as the resources available to students within the training site; the need for immediate, context-specific decision making; and the unique case load

placed on students. Indeed, “the emphasis on whether or not an individual is competent patently neglects the essential subtleties” of professional work (Collins et al., 2015, p. 4). In attempting to prescribe competencies intended for universal application across such a variety of work contexts, scholars and professional associations have run the risk of developing standards that cannot capture the intricacies of context-specific work and, thus, possess diminishing utility for describing and evaluating skilled professional work (Collins et al., 2015; Talbot, 2004).

Evaluating the Outcomes of Graduate Professional Training

Because graduate professional programs maintain their existence under the assumption they produce individuals with the advanced skills necessary to do certain kinds of work more competently than their non-trained peers, scholars have increasingly focused on evaluating the student outcomes of graduate training. Do students graduate with the skills necessary to do work in their given field? What kinds of skills, if any, do students lack even after participating in graduate training? How does program curriculum shape student outcomes? Answers to such questions provide insight into the effectiveness of graduate training for specialized professional work as well as future directions for the evolution of graduate professional programs.

Several studies raise concerns regarding key skills graduates may lack even as they transition to the workforce. Both Boyatzis, Stubbs, and Taylor (2002) and Jaeger (2003) argued individuals graduating from Master’s-level business management and public administration programs respectively lacked necessary emotional intelligence. Similarly, Crook-Lyon et al. (2012) found professional psychologists felt underprepared to address issues of religion and spirituality in their practice even after completing their graduate training. These critiques, however, do not serve as wholesale indictments of graduate professional programs. For example, Boyatizis et al. (2002) acknowledged, despite shortcomings in emotional intelligence skills,

students developed discipline-specific knowledge and critical thinking skills during their business management training. Van Voorhis and Hostetter (2006) found students enrolled in a Master's-level social work program developed increased commitment to self- and client-empowerment, a key value of the profession, during their graduate training. Thus, empirical investigation into the student outcomes of graduate professional programs offers mixed results. Such programs do assist students in building many of specialized skills needed for their given field, but graduates still possess particular shortcomings and blind spots that may adversely affect their professional practice.

Importantly, scholars translate shortcomings in graduates' skills to shortcomings in graduate program curricula. For example, in noting Master's-level public administration students lacked emotional intelligence, Jaeger (2003) argued, "Curriculums are rarely designed to help students discover and improve their levels of emotional intelligence" (p. 616). Similarly, Crook-Lyon et al. (2012) connected professional psychologists' discomfort with issues of religious and spirituality to the de-emphasis of these topics within their graduate preparation. The literature positions graduate professional education, then, as the primary, most influential space in which students develop the knowledge and skills needed for highly skilled, highly specialized work. Given the dynamic nature of professional work and workplace contexts (Fenwick & Nerland, 2014), however, graduate professional programs must be willing to adapt in order to meet this responsibility. As Colby (2013) noted, some professional programs may resist such change in order to maintain more conventional, familiar curricular structures. Graduates' deficits in particular skills, therefore, may emerge not from programs' intentional neglect of these skills but rather from programs' inability to align curricula with the shifting priorities of and requirements for specialized professional work.

Connections to Student Affairs Graduate Preparation

In the preceding discussion on Master's-level professional education, I leveraged scholarship from a range of disciplines outside of student affairs in order to situate the concerns of the student affairs profession within the broader issues facing graduate professional education in the United States. In looking toward the body of literature focused specifically on student affairs graduate preparation, I wish to draw several connections between themes that appear in professional education scholarship both within and outside of the student affairs field. The emergence of student affairs graduate preparation programs mirrors the broader trends toward professionalization and specialization in graduate education within the last century (Commission on the Future of Graduate Education in the United States, 2010). Although student affairs encompasses a number of functional areas, graduate preparation programs nevertheless serve to train individuals for work within a relatively particular niche of the education sector. Furthermore—in keeping with patterns in other fields—the number of graduate preparation programs training student affairs educators has increased exponentially in the past century. Columbia University's Teachers College conferred the first Master's-level student personnel degree in 1914, but over 200 such programs exist a century later (NASPA, 2016; Nuss, 2003). In recent decades, student affairs scholars and practitioners have also moved toward a competency-based approach for defining effective work and structuring graduate training curricula. However, this direction opens the profession and graduate preparation programs to similar critiques regarding the efficacy and utility of such an approach. As in other professional disciplines, debates about defining and assessing student affairs work exist alongside of and in response to continual concerns about the quality of graduate preparation, the readiness of recent graduates to

successfully undertake work, and the profession's agility in adapting to the ever-dynamic realities of modern society.

Student Affairs Graduate Preparation

In focusing on student affairs graduate preparation programs in the United States and the professional learning that occurs in these programs, I begin with literature that seeks to define effective practice for new student affairs educators. Such scholarship, though not without its limitations, attempts to shape a shared vision for what student affairs work entails and what competencies new educators should possess upon leaving preparation programs. I then discuss literature on the structures of preparation programs—including coursework and fieldwork—used to train future student affairs educators. Next, I highlight literature describing challenges new educators encounter in transitioning from graduate preparation to full-time work. I conclude with literature describing approaches for supporting new educators during this transition from graduate preparation to full-time work.

Defining Effective Practice for New Student Affairs Educators

Student affairs scholars have spent decades attempting to define the essential knowledge and skills encompassed within and necessary for effective student affairs practice. Possessing a clear sense of essential competencies for student affairs work, they have claimed, better situates the profession to evaluate the effectiveness of practitioners and to shape preparation programs that instill these competencies in their students (ACPA & NASPA, 2015; Herdlein, Riefler, & Mrowka, 2013; Lovell & Kosten, 2000). Although the specific competencies named have changed over time—largely in response to broader transformations within postsecondary education, such as diversifying student populations and the emergence of new technologies—this

compulsion to delineate what student affairs work should be is a perennial feature of scholarly and professional discourse.

Contributions of scholarship. In one of the earliest studies to address this topic, Newton and Richardson (1976) developed a ranked list of essential competencies. They found practitioners prioritized more general competencies (e.g., demonstrating interpersonal skills and administering programs) over more institution- and functional area-specific competencies (e.g., reading campus politics and learning office policies). Ostroth's (1981) study similarly highlighted the prioritization of general competencies over specific competencies. However, rather than developing a laundry list of knowledge and skills, he attempted to group competencies into several broader themes: (a) assessing student needs and interests, (b) mediating conflicts, (c) group advisement and recognition of group dynamics, and (d) programming. Pope and Reynolds (1997) also framed essential competencies in terms of broader categories: (a) theory and translation; (b) administrative and management skills; (c) ethical and legal experience; (d) teaching and training; (e) assessment and evaluation; (f) helping and interpersonal skills; and, a new addition to the discussion of professional competencies, and (g) multicultural awareness, knowledge, and skills. The addition of this last competency area—multicultural awareness, knowledge, and skills—is a notable contribution of their work and represents the profession's growing concern for working with increasingly heterogeneous student populations. In response to what they saw as disorganized scholarly conversation about student affairs competencies, Lovell and Kosten (2000) conducted a meta-analysis of literature on student affairs professional competencies. They concluded effective practice involved skills in administration and human facilitation, knowledge of student development theory and functional area responsibilities, and personal traits related to integrity and cooperation. Burkard, Cole, Ott,

and Stoflet (2005) echoed Lovell and Kosten's (2000) findings but also argued graduate programs should stress competencies related to technology and program evaluation in response to the changing dynamics of higher education.

Contributions of professional organizations. Professional organizations have also participated in shaping conceptions of student affairs work and the professional competencies that support such work. The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS, 2016), a consortium of 43 postsecondary professional associations, offers standards and guidelines for ensuring quality services in a variety of postsecondary functional areas (e.g., residence life, student activities, and orientation). Most salient to this study, CAS (2012) drafted a series of standards to guide preparation programs' curriculum planning. These standards address three areas: (a) foundational studies, (b) professional studies, and (c) supervised practice. Foundational studies refer to academic content regarding the historical and philosophical foundations of higher education and student affairs. Professional studies include a variety of content knowledge bases, including student development theory, helping skills, student affairs administration, and assessment skills. Supervised practice involves a cumulative 300 hours of practice via practicums and internships across at least two distinct experiences. Despite the presence of CAS standards, programs vary in the degree to which they align to those standards (Herdlein, Kline, Boquard, & Haddad, 2010). Indeed, Kuk and Cuyjet's (2009) review of programs found only a third of sampled programs reported meeting the CAS standards.

ACPA and NASPA, the two largest student affairs professional associations, co-authored (2010) a set of standards intended to define the competencies all student affairs educators should demonstrate regardless of functional area. They identified three levels of competencies (basic, intermediate, and advanced) within each of the 10 areas: (a) advising and helping; (b)

assessment, evaluation, and research; (c) equity, diversity, and inclusion; (d) ethical professional practice; (e) history, philosophy, and values; (f) human and organizational resources; (g) law, policy, and governance; (h) leadership; (i) personal foundations; and (j) student learning and development. The threads of technology, sustainability, and globalism are woven throughout each of the competency areas. The revised version of these standards (ACAP & NASPA, 2015) generally retained the content of the original competency areas, with some changes in language for several areas and the inclusion of technology as a distinct competency area. Similar to the CAS standards, the extent to which graduate preparation programs have utilized the ACPA/NASPA standards in shaping curriculum and pedagogical decisions remains unclear.

Revisiting the critiques of a competency-based approach. Despite the increased centering of professional competencies as a framework for defining and evaluating student affairs work, the critiques of a competency-based approach raised in other professional disciplines are equally salient to this field. I return to those particular critiques and now illustrate them within student affairs contexts. First, the assumed comprehensiveness of competency standards masks the over-simplification of professional work (Collins et al., 2015). Sets of standards for student affairs competencies have grown notably voluminous. Newton and Richardson (1976) developed a ranked list of 40 essential competencies. The *Professional Competency Areas for Student Affairs Educators* (ACPA & NASPA, 2015), which details three levels of competence across 10 competency areas, includes 386 distinct competency outcome statements. Yet even this hefty set of standards may not accurately reflect the scope and complexities of the work student affairs educators encounter in the field. The project of identifying professional competencies, which manifests throughout decades of student affairs

scholarship, may prove fundamentally flawed in seeking to disassemble complex work into discrete, yet ultimately false, components.

Second, competency standards often describe professional work without attention to the contextual intricacies that shape such work (Collins et al., 2015; Talbot, 2004). For example, the *Professional Competency Areas for Student Affairs Educators* (ACPA & NASPA, 2015) "lay[s] out essential knowledge, skills, and dispositions expected of all student affairs educators, regardless of functional area or specialization within the field" (p. 7). Although the authors of this document acknowledge institutional context mediates how educators practically enact these competencies, they do not challenge the applicability or universality of the competencies themselves. The authors make no room for individual practitioners to determine whether or not particular competencies are relevant and useful to their practice and specific contexts. As such, these competency standards cannot account for context-specific variations in how student affairs educators conceptualize and enact their work and, consequently, confine educators within a prescribed vision of what their work should look like.

Structures of Graduate Preparation Programs

Defining the structure of student affairs graduate preparation is a challenging task. As Kuk and Cuyjet (2009) noted, "there is no consistent approach to curriculum content, program pedagogies, or experiential foci" (p. 95) across preparation programs. Program curricula may emphasize counseling, student development, or administration. The number of required credit hours and expectations for practical experiences (e.g., assistantships and internships) also widely varies. Despite these many differences, preparation programs generally require some combination of coursework and fieldwork and seek to make connections between the two.

Scholars have explored the content of coursework and fieldwork and considered their effect on students as they transition to the field and construct professional identity.

Coursework. Scholarship on coursework in preparation program predominantly focuses on the content of such coursework and the various professional values it communicates. Rogers (1991, 1992) illustrated how faculty members nurtured students' development of collaborative leadership through frequent opportunities for personal reflection and exposure to alternative views on leadership. In Young and Elfrink's (1991) study on values education, faculty members cohered around the essential values of the profession—including equality, justice, truth, and community—and attempted to teach these values through formal (e.g., direct instruction) and informal (e.g., role modeling) means. Rogers and Love (2007a, 2007b) found students believed they should prepared to handle issues of spirituality in their work but faculty members were hesitant about the appropriateness of discussing spirituality in courses. Noting the increasing necessity for and emphasis on multicultural competence in postsecondary education, Flowers (2003) found a majority of preparation programs had established or were in the process of establishing a required diversity-focused course.

Scholarship on how coursework and classroom experiences influence new educators' socialization to and preparation for the field offers mixed results. Liddell et al. (2014) found in-class experiences most influential in helping students become involved in professional associations, understand the value of self-evaluation, and model ethical practice. However, they also reported recent program graduates generally perceived out-of-class experiences (e.g., assistantship or internship work) as exerting greater influence on their professional identity than in-class experiences. Similarly, in Renn and Jessup-Anger's (2008) study, new professionals felt their formal coursework had little relevance to the demands of their current positions. Thus,

although coursework may be an important site for exposing students to particular content knowledge (CAS, 2012; Cuyjet et al., 2009), coursework alone proves insufficient for preparing individuals to do student affairs work.

Fieldwork. A large majority of preparation programs require some form of fieldwork experience as part of their curriculum (Kuk & Cuyjet, 2009; Ortiz, Filimon, & Cole-Jackson, 2015). These paraprofessional experiences may take the form of graduate assistantships, internships, and credit-bearing practica. Existing scholarship illuminates the importance of paraprofessional experience in preparing graduate students for full-time student affairs work. In Renn and Jessup-Anger's (2008) study, "nearly all participants wrote about how assistantships, practicum placements, and internships were essential components in their preparation for full-time positions" (p. 329). Liddell et al. (2014) found out-of-classroom experiences, including fieldwork, helped students better navigate institutional culture and politics, expand their professional networks, and understand professional expectations. This scholarship supports the common assumption fieldwork exposes students, at least somewhat, to the demands of student affairs work and allows students to practice knowledge and skills that may prove useful in future full-time employment.

Challenges in Transitioning from Graduate Preparation to Work

New student affairs educators seek full-time employment directly out of or shortly after completing graduate preparation and often enter roles in the same functional area as their graduate fieldwork (Cilente et al., 2006; Richmond & Sherman, 1991). Existing scholarship highlights particular challenges that arise as new educators make this transition to full-time practice. Although this literature does not always specifically name socialization as an underlying framework, key language and concepts of socialization—adaptation to organizational

culture(s) and acquisition of knowledge and skills—appear throughout these studies. Therefore, the particular challenges scholars have identified reinforce the—as I have argued, problematic—primacy of socialization as a framework for understanding graduate preparation for the field.

Whereas graduate preparation provides a structured learning environment in which to expand and refine professional skills, new student affairs educators must take increasing responsibility for their own learning and professional development. As Renn and Jessup-Anger (2008) demonstrated, new educators faced unexpected and unfamiliar challenges as they entered the workforce. However, these individuals struggled to maintain a learning orientation—framing challenges as learning opportunities rather than as setbacks—which affected their ability to self-assess performance and plan their own professional development. Participants felt their preparation programs should have placed greater emphasis on "how to continue to develop professional skills and maintain an awareness of new knowledge and research after graduation" (p. 327), which underscores the need for additional scholarship that explicitly explores issues of professional learning in graduate preparation programs.

Scholars have also noted new student affairs educators are often challenged in reading and adapting to new organizational cultures (Cilente et al., 2006; Cooper et al., 2016; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008). New educators are often unsure of how to confront the ambiguity inherent in reading an institutional or departmental culture and discerning its often unspoken rules and expectations (Cilente et al., 2006). Furthermore, in coming to understand organizational values and priorities, new educators sometimes encounter incongruence with their own values and priorities. For example, Renn and Hodges (2007) found new educators desired to focus their energy on the process of student learning and development whereas their supervisors focused on measuring it. Similarly, Magolda and Carnaghi (2004) described how new educators left

graduate preparation believing student development theory would routinely guide their practice, but the realities of their full-time positions forced them to temper or reframe this expectation. The challenges embedded both in transitioning to a new organizational environment and in responding to tensions that arise during such a transition often generate feelings of discomfort and force new educators to question their fit within the particular institution or the field of student affairs.

Several scholars have raised questions regarding the content of graduate preparation programs and the degree to which student affairs educators graduate with the necessary practical skills to be successful in their new roles. In studies focused on both senior student affairs officers (Dickerson et al., 2011; Herdlein, 2004) and preparation program faculty members (Dickerson et al., 2011), participants were generally satisfied with the learning outcomes of preparation programs but identified major deficits in graduates' abilities regarding fiscal management, legal standards, and assessment. Renn and Jessup-Anger (2008) found these sentiments echoed even in the perspectives of new educators, who identified budgeting, supervision, and assessment as deficiencies in their graduate training. Taken as a whole, these studies highlight the concern graduate preparation programs emphasize only particular kinds of competencies—namely those related to theoretical and content knowledge—at the expense of addressing the practical administrative skills that facilitate day-to-day operations in a student affairs unit (Cooper et al., 2016). This lack of emphasis on administrative skills may have negative consequences for new educators' performance and requires the supervisors of new educators to provide additional on-the-job training to fill such gaps in skills (Cuyjet et al., 2009).

Approaches for Supporting Transition to Work

In response to the aforementioned challenges new educators encounter in transitioning from graduate preparation to full-time work, the professional literature offers approaches for supporting this transition process. Again, this body of work assumes successful socialization is the key for preparing new educators for the field. In that spirit, the identified approaches for supporting transition to work frequently align with and are intended to move new educators toward outcomes of successful socialization, such as adaptation to a new organizational culture and acquisition of requisite knowledge and skills.

Several of the approaches for supporting transition to work focus on new educators and the actions they should take in ensuring successful socialization. For example, scholars have argued new student affairs educators should map out, understand, and integrate into their organization's cultural environment (Amey, Jessup-Anger, & Tingson-Gatuz, 2009; Barr, 1990). Additionally, scholars have highlighted the need for new educators to build professional relationships at their new institutions, such as those with student affairs mentors (Barr, 1990; Reesor, Bagunu, & Hazley, 2009; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008) and faculty members (Consolvo & Dannells, 2009). Approaches targeted at the actions of individuals entering a new organization underscore the belief new student affairs educators are ultimately responsible for their socialization experiences and should be proactive in taking steps to ensure successful transition to the field.

Other approaches for supporting the transition to work focus on the organizations into which new educators enter and the actions existing staff can take in supporting them. These approaches especially focus on the critical role of supervisors, those individuals directly supervising new professionals, who structure work experiences, provide performance feedback,

and share information regarding campus culture (Schneider & Bailey, 2009). Synergistic supervision, one model of supervision, has received increasing attention in student affairs scholarship and describes a cooperative developmental process in which new educators make meaning of their experiences and plan professional development (Winston & Creamer, 1997). Scholars have linked synergistic supervision to greater job satisfaction and decreased intent to leave the field for new educators (Shupp & Arminio, 2012; Tull, 2006). Stock-Ward and Javorek (2003) put forth an integrated development model of supervision in which supervisors assist new educators in moving from confusion and uncertainty to a strengthened professional identity. In addition to strong supervision, scholars have highlighted orientations (Saunders & Cooper, 2009), professional portfolios (Denzine, 2001), informal relationships with work colleagues (Strayhorn, 2009), and ongoing professional development via professional associations (Janosik, 2009) as other organizational tools for supporting new educators' transition to full-time work.

The approaches for supporting transition to work outlined in this section—aimed at both new student affairs educators and the organizations they join—focus on nurturing new educators' socialization process. These approaches are designed to support new educators as they enter an organizational culture, learn about the spoken and unspoken rules of that culture, and ultimately integrate themselves into the organization. Missing from the discussion of these approaches, however, is an attention to the professional learning that precedes the transition to work, the communities in which that learning occurs, and the ways in which graduate preparation learning communities uniquely position new educators as they begin the transition to full-time work. The ways in which a new educator maps and makes meaning of a new organizational culture ultimately rest upon the organizational cultures from which they emerge. The ways in which they perform their new role—the tools they use, the knowledge they draw upon, the priorities they

pursue—ultimately rest upon the ways in which they performed their previous role(s). The field would benefit from thinking about the transition from graduate preparation to full-time work not only as a socialization process but also as one part of a larger story of culturally, historically, and socially mediated professional learning.

Much of the current literature on student affairs graduate preparation, both explicitly and implicitly, relies on a socialization framework. Conversations about identifying professional competencies and the extent to which new practitioners possess these competencies frame knowledge, skills, and attitudes as entities outside of and acquired by the individual practitioner. Scholars investigating the role of coursework and fieldwork in training graduate students (e.g., Liddell et al., 2014; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008) have focused on socialization processes such as professional identity development. As noted above, strategies for supporting graduate students' transition to the workforce similarly emphasize socialization processes. However, this theoretical perspective alone cannot fully capture the challenges of preparing individuals for the complexities of student affairs work. Scholarship rooted in a socialization framework perpetuates an additive view of learning—frequently challenged in contemporary adult learning scholarship—and underplays the role of context in shaping learning processes. In response, my study leverages cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) in order to gain a sociocultural learning perspective on students' professional learning during their graduate training. CHAT is especially useful for making sense of students' ongoing activity, which captures observable behaviors and internal cognition, as well as the complex and interconnected learning environments in which students operate.

Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT)

Scholars have interpreted cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) in slightly different ways and, in their unique interpretations and applications of CHAT, have emphasized certain theoretical elements over others (Roth & Lee, 2007; Roth, Radford, & LaCroix, 2012). As such, scholars have described CHAT not as a monolithic, cleanly defined theory but rather as a collection of sensibilities and assumptions regarding the nature of learning and the relationships between individuals and the environments they occupy (Roth et al., 2012). Despite these differences, the scholars who developed and continue to utilize CHAT cohere around a perspective that "theorizes persons continually shaping and being shaped by their social contexts that immediately problematizes knowledge as something discrete or acquired by individuals" (Roth & Lee, 2007, p. 189). CHAT offers a departure from the dualistic assumptions of thinking and being that pervade the majority of learning and development theories (Foot, 2014; Roth et al., 2012). In this section, I trace the evolution of CHAT and the emergence of major constructs—mediated action, object-oriented activity, activity systems, and joint activity—involved in the theory. Then I review empirical work that utilizes CHAT for exploring workplace learning and graduate training, which can offer perspective on my study regarding the professional learning that occurs in student affairs graduate preparation.

Major Constructs of CHAT

Engeström (1987, 2001) first conceived the evolution of CHAT within three generations, and contemporary scholars working with CHAT have coalesced around this description of the theory's history. Each of these generations enriched and expanded the theoretical underpinnings of CHAT and contributed key constructs for using CHAT in research and practice. In the first generation, Vygotsky (1978) formulated the basic tenets of *mediated action* as a framework for

human development. In the second generation, scholars such as Leontiev (1974) and Engeström (1987) expanded upon Vygotsky's ideas in fleshing out the dimensions of *object-oriented activity* and *activity systems*. In the third and current generation of CHAT, scholars (e.g., Cross, 2011; Roth & Lee, 2007; Yamagata-Lynch & Haudenschild, 2009) have turned their attention to *joint activity* and the interplay between multiple activity systems.

Mediated action. The first generation of CHAT scholarship encompasses Vygotsky's initial work on activity theory and his identification of the mediated action triangle. Part of a post-revolution group of Soviet scholars tasked with reformulating psychology to incorporate Marxist principles, Vygotsky argued for a comprehensive approach to human psychological processes (Luria, 1979) that emphasized the relationship between individuals and their social environments (Cole, 1985; Wertsch, 1985). In this reformulation, he sought "to capture the co-evolutionary process individuals encounter in their environment while learning to engage in shared activities" (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010, p. 15). Whereas other scholars of the same period sought a scientific perspective on psychology that separated organism from environment, Vygotsky (1978) posited organism and environment were components of a complex, interconnected system that co-constructed consciousness through human participation in activity.

Vygotsky (1987) offered *mediated action* as a construct for explaining the process by which humans interact with artifacts, tools, and social others in an environments and how these interactions result in new meaning making and consciousness development. The relationships between artifacts, tools, and social others are dynamic rather than static, and individuals make meaning of the world as they modify and create activities that transform artifacts, tools, and people in their environments. Mediated action involves interaction between individuals and mediating artifacts/tools and signs, semiotically produced tools. Although signs do not possess

concrete physical existence in the environment, they serve as a byproduct of the interactions between individuals and artifacts/tools in mediating thought processes (Vygotsky, 1978).

Scholars often depict the construct of *mediated action* in the form of a triangle (see Figure 2.1; Cole & Engeström, 1993). The *subject* refers to the individual(s) engaged in the activity. The *mediating artifact/tool* includes artifacts, social others, and prior knowledge that contribute to the individual's experiences within the activity. The *object* refers to the goal(s) of the activity. In representing these constructs within a triangle, Vygotsky sough to emphasize the influence each of the constructs has over the others. Rather than relying on a dualistic stimulus-response perspective, mediated action assumes the various constructs involved in mediated action are mutually transforming.

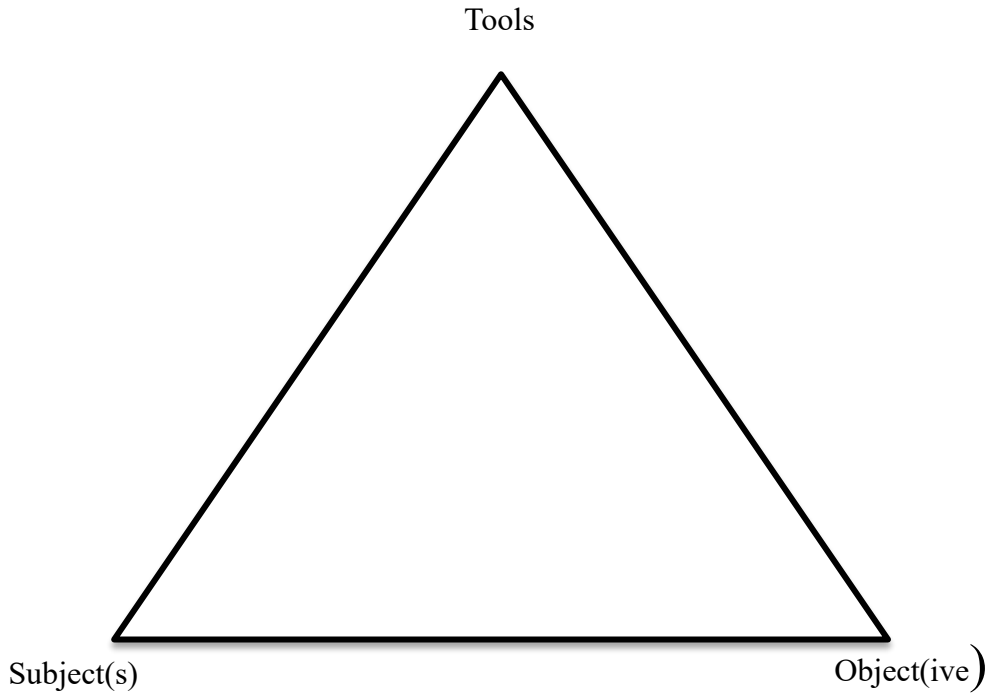

Figure 2.1. Mediated Action
Adapted from Cole & Engeström (2003)

Due to the challenge of translating Vygotsky's original work from Russian into English, some debate has emerged in recent years regarding the nature of the *object* in his mediated action

triangle (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). Scholars have interchangeably referred to the *object* as the goals of an activity, the motives for participating in an activity, and material products individuals gain by participating in an activity. Therefore, current CHAT scholars have disagreed on the nature of object-oriented activity, a concept that emerged in the second generation of CHAT's evolution (Nardi, 2005). Nevertheless, scholars generally agree the *object* describes the reason why an individual partakes in an activity (Kaptelinin, 2005) and holds together the elements of an activity (Hyysalo, 2005).

Object-oriented activity. After Vygotsky's death, his colleague Leontiev continued to expand upon activity theory. Attempting to bridge the division between cognition-oriented and behavior-oriented perspectives on human psychology, Leontiev (1974) and his contemporaries positioned human activity—which includes both internal cognition and observable behavior—as the unit of analysis in activity theory. Specifically, he argued for attention on object-oriented activity, which he defined as,

> [A] molar and nonadditive unit of a material subject's life. In a narrower and more psychological sense, activity is a unity of life mediated by mental reflection whose real function is to orient the subject to the world of objects. Activity is thus not a reaction or a totality of reactions, but rather a system possessing structure, inner transformations, conversations, and development. (p. 10)

Within object-oriented activity, the events and consequences generated through participants' experiences may qualitatively change participants, their goals, the environment, and the activity itself (Davydov, 1999; Kaptelinin, 2005; Rogoff, 1995). Like his predecessor Vygotsky, Leontiev sought to explain human learning through a framework that did not treat organism and

environment as separate entities (Galperin, 1992; Rozin, 2004) and instead described it as series of object-oriented activities (Lazarev, 2004).

Activity systems. Whereas previous scholars focused their work on theorizing about the nature and purpose of human activity, Engeström's (1987) work shaped activity theory through his attention to analytical methods for studying human activity. He introduced activity systems analysis, which "is used to map the co-evolutionary interaction between individuals or groups of individuals and the environment, and how they affect one another" (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010, p. 22). In keeping with previous activity theorists, Engeström (1987) positioned object-oriented activity as the unit of analysis. Notably, however, he stressed object-oriented activity and the environments in which such activity occurs possess social, cultural, and historical dimensions (Cole, 1996). These sociocultural conditions are central to understanding individuals, the tools and artifacts they utilize, the objects they pursue, and the transformations that occur within an activity system. Engeström's work provided the foundation for shifting from *activity theory* to *cultural-historical activity theory*.

Like Vygotsky's mediated action model, Engeström's (1987) activity systems model (see Figure 2.2) is represented in the form of a triangle. The top triangle—Vygotsky's original mediated action model—details the *subjects* (an individual or groups of individuals), *tools* (artifacts and social others), and *objects* (goals or motives of the activity) involved in the activity system. As Engeström and Middleton (1996) noted, subjects invent, purchase, discard, and replace tools throughout the course of an activity. As such, the value of a tool may change over time as the subject engages in new activities. The *rules*, *community*, and *division of labor* constructs represent Engeström's expansion of Vygotsky's work and underscore the sociopolitical leanings of his model. *Rules* refer to the formal and informal regulations that may

constrain or liberate the activity and provide subjects with guidance on how to pursue their objects and engage with social others (Engeström, 1993). *Community* is the social group with which subjects identify as they engage in activities. *Division of labor* describes how tasks involved in activity are shared among the community. Each of the six constructs involved in Engeström's model has the potential to provoke transformation in the other constructs.

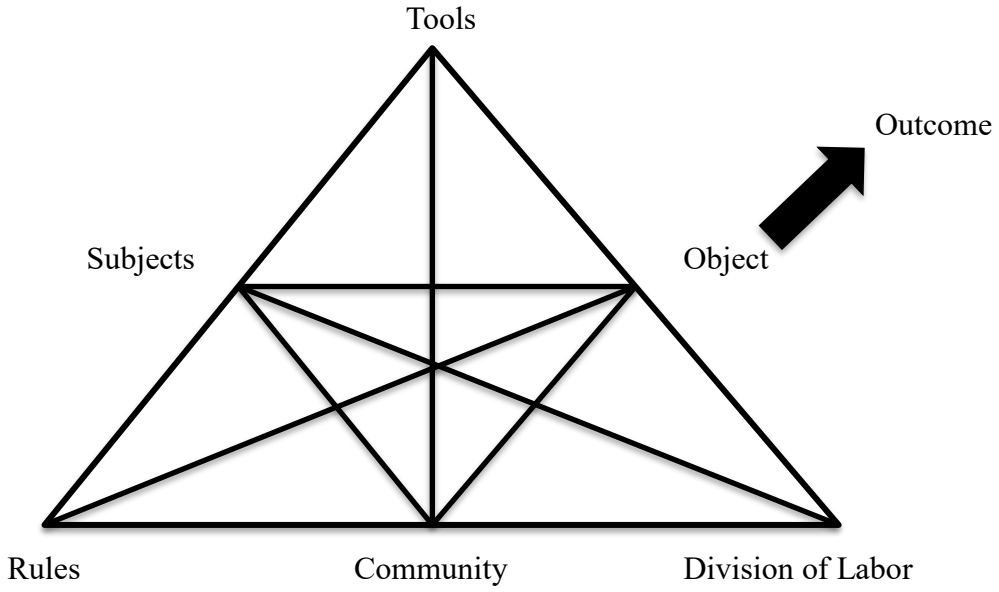

Figure 2.2. Activity Systems Model
Adapted from Engeström (1987)

In order to better understand the transformation and innovation that occurs within activity systems, Engeström (2001) suggested focusing on the manifestation of contradictions, "historically accumulating structural tensions within and between activity systems" (p. 137). Such contradictions are normal in activity systems and may appear "as disturbances, dilemmas, and disruptions that cause discoordinations or deviations in activity" (Cross, 2011, p. 825). Contradictions within or between activity systems may not be apparent to subjects in the system(s) (Nelson & Kim, 2001) or may be apparent but not viewed as a problem and, thus, ignored (Engeström, Engeström, & Suntio, 2002). Engeström (1987, 2001) identified four levels

of contradictions. Primary contradictions occur within one of the given components of the activity system (e.g., subjects possess the same object but have different views on how to achieve that object). Secondary contradictions occur between components of the activity system (e.g., subjects disagree with the rules they must follow in pursuing an object). Tertiary contradictions manifest when the object or method for pursuing the object of another activity system is introduced to the central activity system (e.g., subjects are required to use new tool in pursuing an object). Quartenary contradictions emerge between the constructs of the central activity system and those of a neighboring activity system (e.g., between the rules of one activity system and the rules of another).

Joint activity. As Engeström's tertiary and quartenary contradictions—which focus on interactions across multiple activity systems—allude to, third generation CHAT scholars have increasingly shifted their attention toward joint action. More recent scholars (e.g., Cross, 2011; Roth & Lee, 2007; Yamagata-Lynch & Haudenschild, 2009) have stressed activity systems do not occur in isolation but rather border, connect to, and interact with numerous other activity systems (see Figure 2.3). As such, their work focuses on how mediated activity in one activity system extends beyond its initial borders and may create chain reactions of contradictions and transformations across multiple systems (Yamagata-Lynch & Haudenschild, 2009). However, theoretical and empirical scholarship on questions of joint activity remains underdeveloped compared to work utilizing first generation (i.e., mediated action) or second generation (i.e., single activity system) CHAT constructs.

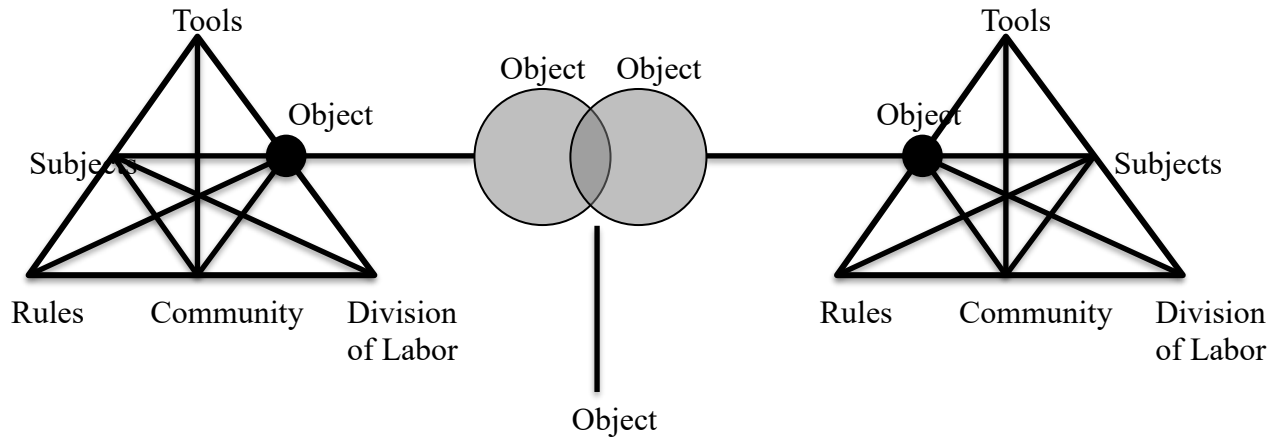

Figure 2.3. Example of Joint Activity across Multiple Systems
Adapted from Engeström (1987)

CHAT in Workplace Learning

At its core, CHAT centers on making sense of complex learning environments. Through exploring how humans engage in particular socially, historically, and culturally mediated activities and mapping the relationships between the various components of an activity system, CHAT scholars gain insight into how individuals transform themselves and their environments. Because CHAT is useful for examining complex activity in complex environments, scholars have increasingly utilized CHAT as a framework for studying professional learning in workplace contexts. For example, several studies (Yamagata-Lynch, 2003; Yamagata-Lynch & Haudenschild, 2009) use CHAT as lens for understanding the various tensions and transformations that occur in offering district-wide teacher professional development. Additionally, scholars have leveraged CHAT for improving hospital staff practices, such as developing treatment plans for patients with dementia (Teodorczuk, Mukaetova-Ladinska, Corbett, & Welfare, 2015) and engaging in interprofessional team debriefings (Eppich & Cheng, 2015). Scholars have also utilized CHAT to understand phenomena occurring in a wide range of business contexts, including low-income employees' access to workplace learning in small

businesses (McPherson & Wang, 2014), the workplace learning of older workers in manufacturing companies (Migliore, 2015), and effective training for sales and marketing professionals in a global corporation (Marken, 2006).

Although dispersed across a variety of work environments, these studies share several commonalities that justify the use of CHAT as a theoretical framework. First, the learning under investigation takes place in environments involving a complex network of actors, tool, rules, and objectives. Each of these studies highlights the need to focus not simply on the central subject (e.g., the teacher, nurse, or manufacturer) but rather on the entire system in which the subject is situated. By attending to the broader environment, scholars gain a more nuanced understanding of how individuals' learning is situated within and mediated by a dynamic, interconnected system of factors. Second, these studies focus on phenomena related to innovation and transformation. Recognizing the rapid pace of change occurring in many workplace contexts due to the emergence of new technologies, these scholars seek to understand how various actors engage in learning in order to develop new skill sets and address new problems.

CHAT in Graduate Training

Whereas scholars have increasingly leveraged CHAT for exploring issues of learning in workplace contexts, minimal scholarship uses the theory to explore those same issues in graduate training for professional work. In a rare example, Hopwood and McAlpine (2015) argued CHAT served as a useful framework for considering how PhD programs in geography prepare their students for future academic work. More frequently, scholars interested in applying CHAT to postsecondary contexts have focused on undergraduate student learning contexts, including individual undergraduate courses (Barab, Barnet, Yamagata-Lynch, Squire, & Keating, 2002; Turpen & Finkelstein, 2013; Wells, 2013) and undergraduate programs (Ellis 2013).

Most relevant to this study, Bondi (2011) utilized CHAT in exploring how student affairs preparation practices are complicit with the neocolonial project in postsecondary education. However, my proposed study deviates from Bondi's work in several ways. First, Bondi leveraged CHAT in analyzing how practices in a single preparation course perpetuated the oppressive forces of neoliberalism and remained at odds with the profession's stated commitment to diversity and inclusion. My study takes a broader approach in understanding the activity involved in student affairs graduate preparation. Rather than focusing on a single course, I intend to investigate how students navigate and learn across multiple learning environments, including formal classroom spaces and fieldwork settings. Furthermore, I focus CHAT toward understanding professional learning within graduate preparation rather than critiquing graduate preparations' complicity with the neoliberal project. Second, Bondi's analysis focused most heavily on the subjects, rules, and division of labor present within the activity system of the classroom. The elements comprise only part of Engeström's activity system model. In my own study, I utilize activity systems analysis—a methodology Bondi did not employ—to do a complete analysis of relevant activity systems, including the tools, communities, and objects embedded in these systems.

Despite its limited use in scholarship on graduate education, CHAT deserves greater attention in this area for exactly the same reasons scholars have popularized it in research on learning in workplace contexts. Like work settings, graduate professional education contexts involve activity between complex networks of individuals, tools, and communities. With its focus on the cultural, historical, and social dimensions of learning environments, CHAT is well positioned for framing the phenomena occurring in these networks in a way that recognizes the unique features, cultures, and objectives of various professional disciplines. Furthermore,

graduate professional education necessarily involves transformation and innovation as future professionals develop new knowledge and skills and prepare to enter a constantly evolving workforce. CHAT, then, serves as one promising avenue for extending scholarly knowledge on the role of graduate education in preparing individuals to do work.

Conceptual Model

The conceptual model guiding this dissertation (see Figure 2.4) incorporates existing scholarship on student affairs graduate preparation and CHAT. As depicted below, this model acknowledges the multiple and interconnected environments in which graduate students learn to do student affairs work. Because each of these learning environments contain distinct configurations of material artifacts, social others, and rules guiding individual and group behavior, each student participates in a unique graduate preparation experience. In order to fully understand the professional learning that occurs during graduate training, then, one must remain attuned to not only the individual student but also the interactions between individual students and their social and material realities. Furthermore, this model acknowledges student affairs graduate preparation as a collection of learning environments situated within and mediated by social, cultural, and historical trends. Graduate preparation programs are not static entities but instead are shaped by and respond to broader forces, such as transformations in the demographics and needs of U.S. postsecondary students, the guiding vision and philosophy of the student affairs profession, and pedagogical approaches to teaching and learning.

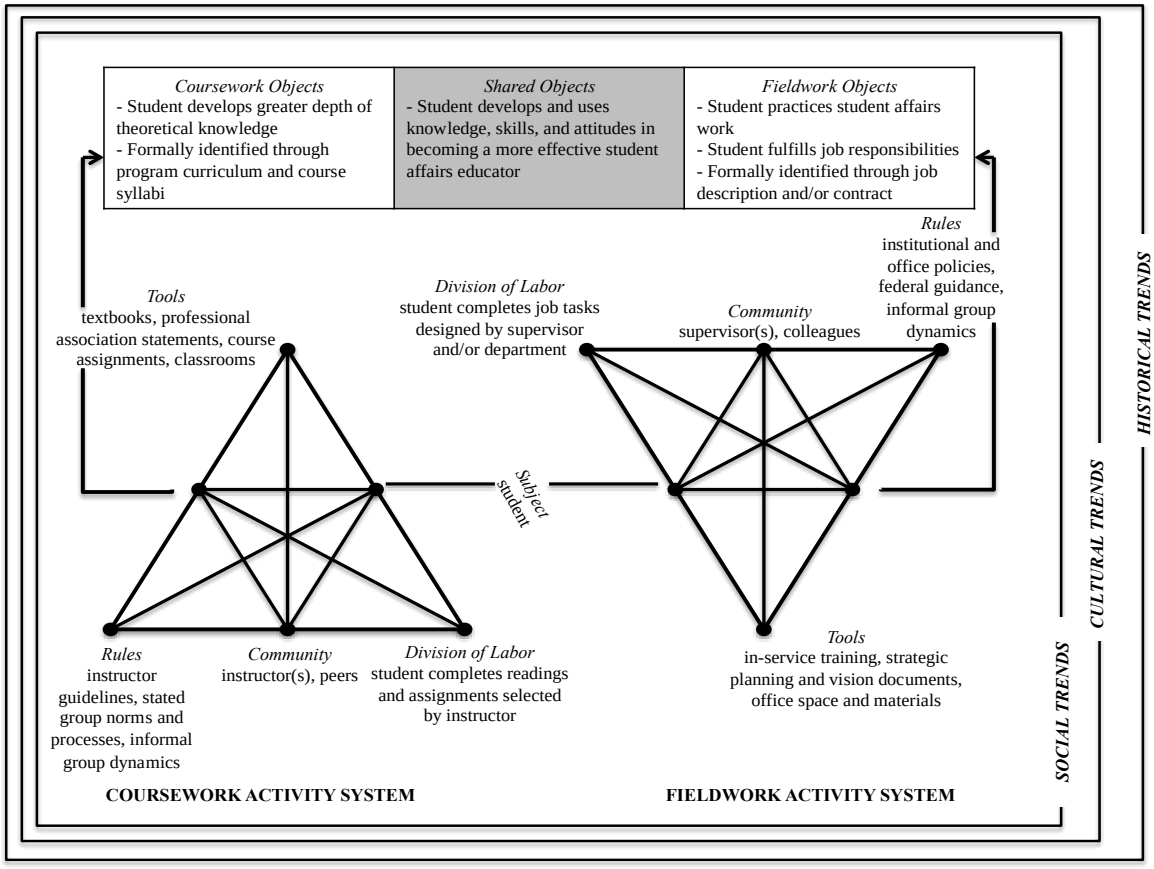

Figure 2.4. Conceptual Model of Student Affairs Graduate Preparation as Activity System(s)

This model frames coursework (e.g., academic courses and classroom environments) and fieldwork (e.g., assistantships and internships) as the central sites for students' professional learning during graduate preparation. Each of these sites comprises its own activity system, separate from and yet connected to the other. In exploring a CHAT perspective on student affairs graduate preparation, I leverage the major constructs of the activity systems model:

(a) The individual student serves as the *subject* of each activity system.

(b) Within each activity system, students encounter and have access to unique sets of *tools* in pursuing certain activities. Whereas students may utilize textbooks, course syllabi, and online course management platforms in completing coursework-related

activities, they may utilize departmental planning documents, training sessions, and material resources in completing fieldwork-related activities. Even the physical spaces of the respective learning environments—classroom versus office—represent tools unique to that activity system.

(c) Each activity system includes a unique *community* of social others, such as instructors and peers in the coursework system and supervisors and colleagues in the fieldwork system.

(d) Formal and informal *rules* guide each of the systems. In coursework environments, the instructor may implement certain rules (e.g., selecting readings and assignments, setting deadlines, enforcing institutional policies) and also create space for students to collaboratively design group norms (e.g., expectations for class participation and civility). In fieldwork environments, federal, institutional, and departmental policies inform the scope and nature of work. In both settings, however, informal rules may play a powerful role in shaping how individual navigate interpersonal relationships and engage in particular activities.

(e) The particular rules and community of a learning environment influence the *division of labor* within that environment. For example, in a coursework system, the instructor designs a sequence of readings and tasks the student then completes. Similarly, in a fieldwork context, the supervisor designs and/or oversees tasks the student completes.

(f) Students engage in activity within both systems as they pursue particular *objects,* or the goals of activity. Coursework and fieldwork activity systems involve both distinct and related objects. Coursework activities, as often stated in program curriculum and course syllabi, enable students to develop greater depth of theoretical knowledge.

Fieldwork activities enable the student to practice skills within a real-world context but also serve to fulfill the functions of the unit for which the student works. The two activity systems share the common goal, however, of helping students to develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for effective student affairs practice.

Contradictions, the cumulative tensions emerging within and between activity systems, serve as markers of potential transformation and innovation in the system(s) (Engeström, 2001). Since CHAT frames learning as the process by which individuals transform themselves and their environments, the contradictions that emerge in student affairs graduate preparation are crucial to my understanding of students' professional learning. Revisiting Engeström's (1987, 2001) four levels of contradictions, I conceptualize each level within a potential student affairs graduate preparation context (see Table 2.1).

Contradiction Level	**Description**	**Potential Manifestation in Graduate Preparation**
Primary	Occurs within one component of an activity system	Contradiction within the *rules* component of an activity system: Formal policies for supervision and reporting in the fieldwork site contradict with the unspoken, informal practices for supervision and reporting. For example, a graduate student may officially report to a particular full-time practitioner but in reality receive little guidance from them. Instead, they build a mentoring relationship with another colleague in the office.
Secondary	Occurs between components of an activity system	Contradiction between the *tools* and *object* of an activity system: Readings and scholarship utilized in a particular course do not align with the academic program's guiding mission and goals. For example, whereas the program espouses emphasis on intercultural competence and critical perspectives on education, readings in the introductory student development theory course focus exclusively on dominant student populations and fail to interrogate alternative ways of conceptualizing human development.

Table 2.1. Levels of Contradictions in Student Affairs Graduate Preparation

Table 2.1 (cont'd)

Tertiary	Occurs when the object or tools for pursuing the object of one system is introduced to another system	Contradiction between the *tools* of one system and the *object* of another system: The institution requires a student's fieldwork office to adopt a new technology platform that does not align with the office's unique needs and purposes. For example, the Vice President for Student Affairs requires all division units to collect assessment data through a tool focused primarily on student satisfaction. This conflicts with the student activities office's strategic plan to shift away from student satisfaction and toward student learning.
Quartenary	Occurs between the components of neighboring activity systems	Contradiction between *rules* of one system and the *rules* of another system: The academic program's expectations for a student differ from those of the student's fieldwork office. For example, a course instructor expects a student working in residence life to carefully prepare for class and read all assigned material. However, while preparing for class, the student receives an emergency call via the duty line that occupies them for the rest of the evening. The student cannot simultaneously satisfy academic and fieldwork expectations.

I anticipate encountering multiple levels of contradictions during this investigation. As Engeström et al. (2002) noted, subjects either may not be aware of contradictions or may recognize a contradiction but not deem it a problem. Thus, the contradictions that spur transformation and innovation within an activity system may be hiding in plain sight, disguised as routine habits, non-issues, or "just how things are done." I am especially interested in quartenary contradictions that emerge between coursework and fieldwork activity systems. Scholars have discussed how graduate students often interpret coursework and fieldwork as separate (Liddell et al., 2014), and at times even adversarial (Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008), experiences. The ways in which students navigate the relationship between coursework and

fieldwork contexts may shape the nature of their professional learning and their conceptualizations of student affairs work.

Revisiting Research Questions

Student affairs educators undertake complex yet necessary work in supporting the learning and development of students enrolled in postsecondary education, yet perennial anxiety about the competence of new professionals entering the field (e.g., Cuyjet et al., 2009; Dickerson et al., 2011; Herdlein, 2004) and high rates of attrition from the field (Lorden, 1998; Tull, 2006) raise concerns for how the profession trains individuals to do student affairs work. Whereas previous scholars have focused on graduate preparation as a site of socialization—exploring the ways in which individuals access and adapt to new organizational contexts—I seek to center graduate preparation first and foremost as a site of learning. Thus, I ask the central question: *How do students in a Master's-level student affairs program learn to do student affairs work during their graduate preparation?* Ultimately, successful student affairs practice rests on more than individuals' ability to develop professional identity and to integrate into a work context. Student affairs work demands capacity for repeatedly responding to adaptive challenges (Heifetz et al., 2009) and ill-structured problems (King & Kitchener, 1994) that possess no clear or easy solutions. A learning-oriented perspective on student affairs graduate preparation, then, allows me to think in new ways about how educators-in-training learn to do dynamic, person-centered work. The process of learning to do student affairs work—not simply entering the student affairs profession—cannot be fully captured through concern for how individuals adopt professional values or perceive their role in an organization. Instead, it requires investigation into deeper transformations of the self and the particularities of the environment in which such transformations occur.

In refining my perspective on learning and the particular questions I seek to ask about graduate students' professional learning, I utilize CHAT, which frames learning as the process by which individuals transform themselves and their environment(s), including social others, through a constant series of activity (Engeström, 1987; Roth & Lee, 2007). CHAT also stresses how human activity, and by extension learning, is situated within and shaped by larger cultural, historical, and social traditions and patterns (Foot, 2014; Niewolny & Wilson, 2009; Roth et al., 2012). Whereas previous scholarship on student affairs graduate preparation ignores or significantly underplays the role of context in shaping students' graduate training, employing CHAT allows me to consider how environmental factors—the particular tools and resources available to students, the particular communities in which students participate, the particular spoken and unspoken rules that govern students' actions—fundamentally shape how graduate students learn to do student affairs work. CHAT is especially useful in this endeavor because it assists researchers in making sense of complex, real-world contexts in a manageable and meaningful way (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). In leveraging the activity systems model (Engeström, 1987; see Figure 2), to inform data collection and analysis, I will be able to map out the various environments that comprise graduate preparation, explore how students interact with their environments in pursuing learning, consider interactions between environments (e.g., academic spaces and fieldwork spaces), and identify the contradictions within environments that foster student transformation. In the remaining part of this section I revisit each of my sub-questions and illustrate how a perspective on learning rooted in CHAT informs them.

Sub-question a: How is students' professional learning distributed across and mediated by multiple activity systems? In articulating my perspective on professional learning, I am ultimately concerned with the ways in which environment, understood as something more

complex than a collection of institutional descriptors, fundamentally mediates student learning. In thinking about student affairs graduate preparation as an environment, I am especially cognizant of the multiple contexts—simultaneously connected to yet separate from each other—in which individuals learn to do student affairs work. Coursework, fieldwork, and additional professional development opportunities weave together to form the totality of the graduate preparation environment. CHAT asserts learning—defined as transformation through human activity—occurs within complex networks of actors and environment-specific factors, known as activity systems (Engeström, 1987). More contemporary CHAT scholars have especially emphasized the need to explore joint activity, the human activity and learning involving interactions across multiple activity systems (Cross, 2011; Roth & Lee, 2007; Yamagata-Lynch & Haudenschild, 2009). Joint activity across multiple activity systems, then, serves as a useful framework for making sense of the environments in which professional learning occurs during graduate preparation. CHAT provides guidance in mapping out particular activity systems—for example, the group of individuals within a single academic course or a departmental team students partake in through fieldwork—as well as interactions across these activity systems.

Sub-question b: How do students access, use, and adapt the tools embedded in their specific activity systems during their graduate training? From the earliest writings of Vygotsky through the present, CHAT scholars have argued human activity and, by extension, learning occurs through mediated action, defined as individuals' access, use, and adaptation of context-specific tools in pursuing particular objectives (Cole & Engeström, 1993; Vygotsky, 1987; Yamagata-Lynch, 2003). Tools—including artifacts, social others, and prior knowledge—serve as fundamental components of activity systems and shape the nature of human activity and learning. In exploring professional learning and the activity systems in which learning occurs

during graduate preparation, I will necessarily focus on the various tools—which may include academic texts, professional standards, and departmental technologies—present within relevant activity systems and the ways in which students access, use, and adapt such tools in pursuing their professional development.

Sub-question c: How do contradictions that emerge within the activity systems of graduate training transform students' professional practice? Engeström (2001) argued for utilizing the manifestation of tensions—the disruptions and dilemmas that alter human activity—as a means for understanding the various transformations that occur in an activity system. Subjects change the nature of their activity, and thus the nature of their activity system(s), in order to overcome such tensions (Engeström, 1987). If learning is defined as the transformation of self through on-going and dynamic activity, tensions serve as catalysts for new learning and new practice. In investigating students' professional learning of students participating in the context of student affairs graduate preparation through a CHAT framework, then, I intend to examine the various tensions that emerge within relevant activity systems. By examining tensions within academic and fieldwork contexts, as well as the responses to these tensions, I will gain greater insight into how these students learn to do student affairs work and enact their professional practice.

Chapter Summary

Master's-level education in the United States increasingly serves to equip individuals with specialized skills necessary to navigate their professional lives. In accordance with this pattern, the student affairs profession utilizes Master's-level preparation programs—involving a combination of fieldwork and coursework experiences—in order to train new practitioners for full-time work in the field. Despite the proliferation of and reliance on graduate training programs, the profession

still suffers from concerns about the competence of new practitioners and high rates of attrition. Scholars of student affairs graduate preparation situate these concerns within a discussion of graduate students' socialization processes but have yet to explore how focused attention on student learning could offer new insight into how individuals develop and sustain a complex professional practice. As such, I offered cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) as a framework for mapping learning and learning environments. CHAT frames learning as the process by which individuals transform themselves and their social environments through on-going activity and provides theoretical models for describing the various components of an activity system (i.e., learning environment). Synthesizing current scholarship on student affairs graduate preparation and CHAT, I developed a conceptual model of student affairs graduate preparation as activity system(s). I then revisited my research questions and highlighted the ways in which they embody a CHAT perspective on professional learning.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

The purpose of this study is to explore how graduate students enrolled in Master's-level student affairs preparation programs learn to do student affairs work and the ways in which this professional learning is located within, distributed across, and mediated by a particular community. In order to explore professional learning within student affairs graduate preparation, I conducted an activity system analysis and case study of Master's students enrolled in a single preparation program. I begin this chapter with discussion of paradigmatic issues and a reflection on my researcher positionality. The remainder of the chapter outlines my research design, including methodology, methods for data collection and analysis, and strategies for ensuring participant well-being and quality of research.

Constructivist Paradigm

My work operates within a constructivist paradigm, in which individuals construct multiple realities through their lived experiences and seek to attach meaning to these experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017). Furthermore, this paradigm acknowledges individuals' worldviews and meanings as mediated by-products of their interactions with social others, historical trends, and cultural norms. Such an acknowledgement aligns with my framing of professional learning within a CHAT perspective, which likewise emphasizes the socially, historically, and culturally mediated dimensions of human activity (Cole, 1996; Engeström, 1987). As Denzin and Lincoln (2017) articulated, the constructivist paradigm assumes a relativist ontology (recognizing multiple realities) and a subjectivist epistemology (recognizing researcher and participants co-construct understanding), which I more fully describe in the following sections.

Relativist Ontology

Ontology describes beliefs about the nature of reality, or "whether the world exists and if so, in what form" (Potter, 1996, p. 36). Constructivism rests upon a relativist ontology, "which holds that all tenable statements about existence depend on a worldview, and no worldview is uniquely determined by empirical or sense of data about the world" (Patton, 2002, p. 97). Thus, individuals may occupy the same world but develop radically different worldviews based upon their lived experiences and meaning-making within unique social, historical, and cultural configurations. Because individuals may develop an infinite number of constructions, there are infinite realities (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Researchers operating from this ontological position focus on the ways in which individuals interpret and make meaning of an event or object and identify patterns across these various worldviews (Glesne, 2011). In this study, I am focused on the ways in which students make sense of and describe their learning and the learning environments they navigate. Even though participants occupy similar physical spaces (e.g., the same classroom or fieldwork office), they possess unique interpretations of these spaces and the activities that occur within them.

Subjectivist Epistemology

Epistemology describes beliefs about the nature of knowledge and the ways in which individuals come to know reality (Glesne, 2011). In regard to conducting research, epistemology refers to assumptions about the relationship between the researcher and respondents and the process by which knowledge emerges from data collection and analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Constructivism utilizes a subjectivist epistemology emphasizing "frequent, continuing, and meaningful interactions between the investigator and the respondents or other objects of investigation" (p. 107). As they interact—engaging in a shared series of interpretations and

reinterpretations—the researcher and respondents co-construct knowledge and understanding about the phenomenon under investigation. Furthermore, the researcher is not removed from the research context and respondents but rather disturbs and shapes what is being studied. From the outset of this study, I have been cognizant of the need to honor and represent participants' unique perspectives and to remain attuned to how my biases manifest in data collection and analysis.

Researcher Positionality

In keeping with my constructivist paradigm, which highlights the researcher as active participant in creating meaning and knowledge through inquiry, I find it necessary to reflect upon my interests in this particular topic and the potential biases I bring to this work. Doing so helps me to think more critically about how I designed this study and analyzed the resulting data.

Throughout my educational journey—as both student and practitioner—the inherent messiness of creating and sustaining meaningful learning environments has fascinated me. My path toward student affairs began during my sophomore year with a leadership development seminar that challenged me to think differently about the nature and purpose of formal education. Within that space I found a community of peers and mentors who cared deeply about and centered holistic development, a sharp contrast to much of my other coursework, which, although interesting, felt disconnected from my evolving sense of self. The dissonance I experienced between those learning environments prompted me to start asking questions: What exactly made the seminar so transformative compared to other formal learning environments? What was different about the content, the relationships between peers and instructors, and the fundamental assumptions about how a classroom should operate? That seminar gave me a vision for what I felt good formal education could and should look like, although I did not necessarily understand how to practically achieve that vision.

As a fourth-grade teacher, I wanted to capture the same spirit—the support, the transformation, the meaning—of the sophomore seminar in my classroom. Admittedly idealistic, I threw myself into planning and preparation, agonizing over lesson plans, seating charts, and classroom procedures. As a college student, I had come to believe effort correlated to outcome. Work hard and you will, more or less, succeed. I now found myself in an environment in which even the best-laid, most meticulous plans could devolve into chaos. I sat through professional development sessions and staff meetings captained by very intense and, I'm sure, very well intentioned instructional coaches who sought to lay out the code for running the perfect classroom. "You are the master of your classroom," they would say, "Just do exactly this or exactly that, and everything will work." The harder I tried to hold on to control, to be this omnipotent presence in the classroom, the further I felt from the spirit of education I came to value as a college student. A teacher's sheer willpower and good intentions could not manufacture a transformative educational space. Instead, it involved something more organic, the collision and synthesis of innumerable factors. Although I did not have the theoretical language to describe it, I was beginning to develop a sociocultural perspective on teaching and learning, to think about formal education as something situated in and influenced by broader forces.

I transitioned to higher education and student affairs work because I felt I could build a more sustainable and philosophically aligned career. The student affairs profession felt more grounded in students' holistic development and well being than what I experienced in elementary education. As I interviewed with various student affairs graduate programs, however, I was struck by how many current and prospective students—and even program faculty members—articulated the same rigidity of thinking and scripted approach to educational work that frustrated me as a teacher. "Being a good student affairs practitioner means doing x, y, and z," they seemed

to say, “Come to our program, and we will turn you into the perfect professional.” I chose the preparation program at Miami University because of its commitment to academic rigor but also, most importantly, because of the community of people who espoused commitment to personal reflection and transformation over becoming a “perfect professional.”

For the most part, I found that espoused commitment to personal reflection and transformation enacted throughout the program—in class discussions, meetings with my fieldwork supervisor, and casual conversations with peers. I was getting the intellectual stimulation and theoretical foundation I wanted out of my graduate training. I was surprised, however, by classmates who were not so satisfied with the program. One peer, in particular, complained about almost every course we took. “This program is just wasting my time,” she would say, “I could do my job without these classes. It’s all just theory. No practical skills.” Though her comments did not resonate with my own experience, they did prompt me to think more deeply about the nature and priorities of excellent graduate training for student affairs work. This frustration with the content and relevance of preparation programs—which I have seen echoed in other graduate students—raises big questions I hope to pursue in this dissertation and beyond: If the profession is truly committed to college student learning and development, how do graduate programs train not simply professionals but educators? How do graduate programs create experiences that feel meaningful to all students, despite their unique needs, perspectives, and goals?

My training as an educator and scholar has influenced my approach to studying student affairs graduate preparation. I am reminded time and again of the power and potential involved in understanding human learning yet the inherent difficulties involved in making sense of such a complex, ambiguous process. I am drawn to perspectives that recognize these difficulties and in

response seek holistic, multidimensional interpretations of human learning and experience. In designing this study, CHAT resonated so strongly with me specifically because it highlighted not only the interconnected complexities of the immediate learning environment but also the broader social, historical, and cultural forces in which learning environments exist. It provided the most complete picture of the "messiness" that is both essential and a hindrance to sustaining meaningful learning environments.

I bring these experiences, perspectives, and assumptions to my research. I recognize they shape—explicitly and implicitly—the ways in which I have identified my research problem and questions as well as the data collection and analysis methods I used in this study. Although my own experiences in a Master's-level student affairs preparation program afforded me some degree of "insider" status in interacting with study participants, I took steps throughout the research process to remain critical of my position within the study and the particular biases I bring to my work.

Activity Systems Analysis and Case Study

A constructivist paradigm lends itself to a qualitative research approach in which the researcher identifies patterns of meaning within social experiences and phenomena (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017). Focusing on students' professional learning during their graduate training, I am necessarily interested in how these students are making sense of their world (Merriam, 1998), namely their experiences in graduate school and their conception and practice of student affairs work. In choosing a more specific qualitative methodology, I recognize the need for a research design that enables me to make sense of a complex, real-world phenomenon (professional learning) within a environment (student affairs graduate preparation) comprised of many and interconnected relationships, each laden with unique social and cultural histories. Additionally, I

am concerned with selecting a methodology that assists me in utilizing my conceptual model, rooted in CHAT, to explore my research questions. As such, I employ both case study and activity system analysis to frame my study design.

CHAT offers a framework for deciphering the complex network of environment-specific entities, relationships, and activities that shape professional learning in student affairs graduate preparation programs. Although scholars have expanded upon and refined CHAT in the past several decades, they have written much less on how to practically conduct empirical research using a CHAT framework (Postholm, 2015; Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). The relative lack of methodological grounding has led, in the eyes of some scholars (Niewolny & Wilson, 2009; Roth et al., 2012; Yamagata-Lynch, 2010), to research that either misrepresents or does not fully realize the theory's core arguments. Therefore, I chose to conduct an activity system analysis (Engeström, 1987; Yamagata-Lynch, 2010), a methodological approach designed specifically for and increasingly used in conducting empirical research within a CHAT framework. In regard to formal learning contexts, scholars have employed activity systems analysis to explore an undergraduate astronomy course (Barab et al., 2002), a corporate training program (Marken, 2006), and teacher professional development programs (Yamagata-Lynch, 2003; Yamagata-Lynch & Haudenschild, 2009).

Activity system analysis offers practical guidance for designing a study that explores human activity in a collective context (Engeström, 1987; Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). This methodology can help researchers

> understand individual activity in relation to its context and how the individual, [their] activities, and the context affect one another. Additionally, it can help document the historical relationships among multiple activities by identifying how the results from a

past activity affect new activities. (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010, pp. 1-2)

In activity system analysis, the researcher identifies a relevant, bounded activity system and maps that system using the constructs involved in Engeström's (1987) activity systems model—subjects, tools, rules, community, division of labor, and objects. In mapping the activity system, the researcher identifies those tensions and contradictions that shape the interactions between various components of the activity system.

Activity system analysis is particularly compatible with naturalistic forms of qualitative inquiry in which the researcher vicariously experiences, makes meaning of, and reports on participants' lived experiences in a natural setting (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). As such, methods for situating research role, collecting and analyzing data, and ensuring trustworthiness of reporting in activity system analysis parallel many of the common conventions in qualitative inquiry (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). In activity systems analysis, researchers enter the field as human instruments cognizant of how their unique perspective influences interpretation of data, how their presence in the field shapes the nature of activity within the system, and how their role within the activity system may fluctuate throughout the investigation. In order to achieve a rich and trustworthy mapping of the relevant activity systems, researchers collect and analyze multiple forms of qualitative data, include interviews, observations, and document analyses. Researchers conducting activity system analysis also enhance the trustworthiness of their findings by remaining immersed in the field for sustained periods of time, member checking data and analysis with stakeholders, triangulating data across multiple data sources, and peer debriefing preliminary analyses with knowledgeable colleagues.

Specifically, "[qualitative] case studies are particularly compatible with the theoretical assertions and analytical intentions involved in activity systems analysis" (Yamagata-Lynch,

2010, p. 63). Case study assists researchers in asking "how" and "why" questions regarding a contemporary phenomenon within a real-world context (Yin, 2014). Activity system analysis likewise focuses on making meaning of phenomena occurring in real-world contexts and the processes by which individuals transform themselves and their environments through activity (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). In order to map and analyze an activity system in a manageable way, the researcher must determine the boundaries of the context(s) in which to collect data and identify a relevant system. This need to define the boundaries in which inquiry occurs, of course, echoes the practice of identifying a bounded system inherent in case study research (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2014). Furthermore, activity system analysis involves the researcher collecting and triangulating multiple sources of qualitative data—most commonly interviews, participant observations, and document analysis—in order to develop a thorough and nuanced description of the various constructs within the system and the interactions amongst these constructs (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). Similarly, case study research does not prescribe to particular methods but rather enables researchers to utilize any collection of methods in developing a holistic description and explanation of the phenomenon under investigation (Merriam, 1998). Activity system analysis expands upon conventional case study methodology by attuning the researcher toward the activity that occurs within the bounded system and providing theoretical constructs for mapping out complex learning environments.

My study is an interpretive case study and activity system analysis of students' professional learning in a Master's-level students affairs preparation program. I use these complementary methodologies to explore how students learn their professional practice through participation in activity systems embedded within the structures of a graduate preparation program and, from this exploration, to theorize more broadly about preparing individuals to do

student affairs work. The following sections detail the specific design of my study, including discussion on the unit of analysis and boundaries of the study and methods employed in collecting and analyzing various forms of data.

Unit of Analysis

Defining the unit of analysis, the case or main subject of the study (Yin, 2014), helps the researcher to focus data collection efforts toward the site, people, and events most relevant to the research questions (Merriam, 1998). In activity system analysis, human activity embedded within its social context serves as the unit of analysis (Engeström, 1987; Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). Given the ambiguity and potential scope of "human activity," however, the researcher must leverage the study's research questions to make informed decisions about the critical activities to collect data on and analyze (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). Because my questions center on students' professional learning, I am most concerned with student activity. This concern comes with several caveats. First, in order to more securely bound this case, I am concerned with student activity undertaken as part of preparation program requirements, such as participating in class sessions and completing fieldwork duties. Although students are involved in a number of activity systems (e.g., friend or extracurricular networks) outside of graduate school, these networks are beyond the scope of this study. Second, I recognize student activity is inherently a social process involving a number of non-student actors. As such, I collected data primarily from current students but enriched those data with additional perspectives from individuals such as program faculty members.

Program Site and Participants

Selection and sampling for this study exists within two phases. First, I describe the Master's-level student affairs preparation program that serves as the broader context for this

study (see Appendix A for recruitment letter). Second, I describe the participants within the selected preparation program who served as the primary sources of data (see Appendix B for recruitment letter).

Program Selection

Because activity system analysis involves sustained and in-depth engagement in the research site (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010), I ground my study within a single student affairs preparation program. In order to purposefully identify an information-rich case (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002) that fully illuminates students' professional learning during graduate preparation, I selected a program that (a) focuses its curriculum specifically on student affairs administration; (b) enrolls most students full-time; (c) offers a majority of its coursework in-person; (d) requires, in keeping with CAS (2012) recommendations, 300 hours of supervised fieldwork (e.g., an internship or assistantship); (e) has an established history of training individuals for student affairs work; and (f) has multiple faculty members actively engaged in the profession through recent publications in top-tier student affairs journals and participation in a variety of professional associations. These criteria represent elements of both typical and unique purposeful sampling (Merriam, 1998).

In typical purposeful sampling (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 1990) the researcher selects a case that reflects an average representation of the phenomenon and is not intensely unusual. As Kuk and Cuyjet (2009) noted, preparation programs vary widely in their curricular focus, specific coursework, and expectations for supervised practice. However, the first four program characteristics I have identified describe most—though certainly not all—preparation programs. In considering eventually disseminating my work within scholarly and professional communities and using this work to inform graduate training for student affairs work, I wish to make my

findings relevant and accessible to the broadest scope of individuals possible. By situating this study within a program that meets these four criteria, I believe most individuals working within student affairs offices and preparation programs will see a narrative that matches their own conception of what graduate preparation involves.

In unique purposeful sampling (Merriam, 1998) the researcher selects a case that offers unique or atypical attributes. The fifth and sixth criteria—established program history and multiple faculty members actively engaged in the profession—represent my desire to select a rich site for exploring issues of professional learning and graduate training. Although the number of graduate preparation programs has continued to proliferate in recent decades (Kuk & Cuyjet, 2009), I sought a program with an established record of training student affairs educators and whose actors could speak to evolutions in professional values, demands placed on student affairs work, and program elements intended to address those values and demands. I was also interested in a program whose faculty members are thoroughly engaged in understanding and shaping the profession and thinking critically about best practices for supporting graduate students' professional preparation. By selecting an exemplary program—one that nevertheless shares similar characteristics to many other preparation programs—I was better able theorize about issues of professional learning and to relate findings from this case to other preparation programs.

I identified the Student Affairs Preparation (SAP) program at Brady University (both pseudonyms) as an ideal research site because it matched all of the criteria listed above. SAP has a lengthy history of training student practitioners and has a strong reputation within the field for its selectivity, quality of graduating students, and post-graduation employment rates. The program attracts a national pool of applicants and subsequently has alumni working at a variety

of higher education institutions across the country. Students in the program are required to hold a graduate assistantship in a student services office at either Brady University or one of the neighboring institutions in the region unless they are already working full-time at a higher education institution. The program curriculum focuses explicitly on student affairs administration, and all full-time program faculty members possess terminal degrees in higher education and experience as student affairs practitioners.

I secured Brady University's SAP program as a research site by contacting the Master's program coordinator via a formal letter (see Appendix A). After agreeing to let the program operate as a potential research site, the program coordinator served as an intermediary in recruiting student participants by sending official recruitment letters (see Appendix B) to all eligible students within the program. In order to protect participant confidentiality, I did not share further information with SAP faculty members about students' study participation or collected data.

Participant Selection

Because student activity serves as the unit of analysis in this study, Master's-level students enrolled in the SAP program served as the primary participants and sources of data. In order to participate in the study, students were required to be: (a) in the second year of the Master's program, (b) enrolled in the program full-time, and (c) employed within a fieldwork site. Because of the structure of the SAP program, student participants could have potentially been employed at institutions other than Brady University, which may have dramatically shaped the nature of their activity system(s) and the interactions between their coursework and fieldwork experiences. Ultimately, however, all student participants worked as graduate assistants at Brady University.

I recruited participants through a formal letter (see Appendix B) sent to all members of the SAP program's second-year cohort via email. This letter emphasized the study's contribution to enhancing graduate training for student affairs practitioners and highlighted participants would be financially compensated for their involvement in the study after their second interview.

I attempted to recruit five to seven students from the SAP second-year cohort. Ultimately, I secured four students who reflected a variety of backgrounds and professional aspirations (see Table 3.1) for participation in this study. Although social identity may play some role in the outlined conceptual model (see Figure 2.4)—for example, mediating how students interact with their communities of social others or experience the effects of larger cultural norms—it is not an explicit component within the model. Therefore, I did not seek to recruit students with particular kinds of social identities or ensure certain identities were represented within the student sample.

Pseudonym	***Race & Ethnicity***	***Gender***	***Sexual Orientation***	***Other Salient Identities***	***Prior Full-Time Work***	***Assistantship Site***
Jake	White	Man	Heterosexual	Cisgender Upper middle/high SES	No	Residence Life
Ann	Biracial; Indian; White	Woman	Heterosexual	Cisgender	Yes	Student Conduct
Dexter	White	Man	Heterosexual	Cisgender Christian	Yes	Career Services
Jane	Black; West Indian	Woman	Heterosexual		No	Career Services

Table 3.1. Participant Demographic Overview

Notes: Students selected their own pseudonyms.

Students defined demographic categories based on an open-ended form (see Appendix E).

In some instances, demographic information was added based on identities students spoke to during interviews.

Ann worked full-time in a student affairs role prior to graduate school. Although Dexter worked full-time for a higher education institution prior to graduate school, he was not in a student affairs role.

Data Collection

Although case study and activity system analysis do not require specific methods, both methodological approaches rely on multiple forms of data in order to construct a rich understanding of the phenomenon and context under investigation and to explore specific research questions (Merriam, 1998; Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). This study utilized interviews and document analysis—standard data collection methods in qualitative inquiry (Merriam, 1998)—to explore how students learn to do student affairs work during their graduate training. Interviews with select program faculty members and document analysis served to enrich my understanding of the selected case, including the program's history, vision for preparing students for student affairs work, and curricular offerings. Interviews with Master's students provided insight into how these individuals acted across multiple community networks, interacted with context-specific tools, and navigated tensions and disruptions as they learned to do student affairs work. Document analysis of select student work (e.g., course assignments and reflection papers) helped to further clarify my understanding of how students made sense of their own professional development and the specific experiences they perceived salient to their learning.

Graduate Preparation Program Information

Program publications. I gathered written materials published by the program in order to understand the specific goals and requirements of the SAP Master's program. Information

collected through the program's website and brochure gave me foundational insight into the program's espoused values, admission requirements, academic curriculum, and fieldwork opportunities. I used this information to triangulate (Merriam, 1998) students' descriptions of their graduate school experiences and formulate an understanding of the broader program culture in which students' activity systems exist.

Faculty interviews. I also gathered information on the program through interviews with faculty members in the program. In determining faculty to interview, I selected faculty members who taught in the program full-time and advised students. I reached out to five faculty members, including the program coordinator, via a formal letter (see Appendix C). The program coordinator and two other faculty members agreed to an interview. Prior to their interview, each faculty member reviewed and signed an informed consent form (see Appendix H). I notified faculty members interviews would be digitally recorded and I would take handwritten notes of our conversation. These interviews were transcribed using a professional transcription service and stored on a password-protected personal computer.

My interview protocol (see Appendix I) with faculty members focused on fleshing out the details of the SAP program curriculum and faculty members' teaching strategies, and faculty members' perceptions of student experiences in classroom spaces. Faculty members discussed the types of courses they typically teach within the program and how they generally structure the goals, content, and learning experiences within these courses. They also discussed their perceptions of student experiences and professional learning both in the program more broadly and within their specific courses. In my interview with the program coordinator, I used the same interview protocol but also asked several questions focused on gathering additional background

information on the program not captured in published materials, such as cohort demographics and impressions of the qualities of students attracted to the SAP program.

Similar to program publications, I used insights gathered through faculty member interviews to triangulate (Merriam, 1998) with information collected through student interviews. Faculty interviews especially provided richer description of the coursework activity systems students navigated during their graduate training. Faculty members could speak to course goals and design with a level of specificity to which students were often not privy. Faculty members could also speak to espoused values and intended outcomes of academic coursework, whereas students spoke to how they ultimately perceived program values and learning environments.

Student Activity Systems and Professional Learning

Student interviews. I utilized interviews with students as the primary mechanism for exploring the activity systems students occupied and their professional learning in these environments. Activity system analysis and case study demands rich understanding of both the relationships between specific components of a single activity system (i.e., subject, tools, objects, rules, community, and division of labor) and the connections between neighboring activity systems (e.g., coursework and fieldwork activity systems). As such, I conducted two one-on-one, semi-structured interviews with each student participant. First interviews (see Appendix F for interview protocol) took place during October 2017, and second interviews (see Appendix G for interview protocol) took place during March 2018. This interview design, which allowed me to conduct some preliminary analysis between interviews and formulate an emergent activity system map, provided three benefits. First, I was able to see obvious gaps in my emergent map for each student participant and ask more targeted questions during our second interview in order to fill in those gaps. Second, I was able to share emergent maps with each student and garner

their reactions. This member checking (Merriam, 1998) allowed students the opportunity to clarify existing claims and participate in the co-construction of their own stories. Third, because several months separated the interviews, students were able to speak to new experiences and insights. The time between the first and second interview ultimately comprised one-quarter of students' graduate training, and in the second interview students drew from new experiences in both their coursework and fieldwork.

Both interview protocols (see Appendices G & H) were semi-structured and organized into four sections to explore the dimensions of individual activity systems and connections between neighboring activity systems. In the opening section of the first interview, I asked questions to build rapport with students and learn about their background prior to the SAP program (e.g., undergraduate studies and key experiences that brought them to the field). In the second interview, I focused this opening section on re-establishing the relationship and getting general updates on their graduate school experience. The second section of the protocols focused specifically on the coursework activity system, with questions addressing what students were doing and learning in their academic courses. The third section of the protocols focused specifically on the fieldwork activity system, with questions addressing what students were doing and learning in their graduate assistantships. The fourth section focused on contradictions within and between activity systems. Per my conceptual model, perceived contradictions serve to highlight student transformation and learning. This section also allowed me to explore how students thought about the relationship between their coursework and fieldwork. Although the second interview protocol followed the same four-part structure as the first interview, I directed questions more toward reviewing the ideas captured in these sections during the first interview and updating ideas based on new experiences that occurred between the interviews.

I conducted the first interview with Jake, Ann, and Dexter in person during a visit to Brady University. During this visit, I was able to briefly meet Jane but conducted the first interview with her via Zoom, a video conferencing platform, due to scheduling conflicts. I gave students control over where we met for their interview to make them feel more at ease during our conversation. I interviewed Dexter at his on-campus office, while Jake and Ann met me for their respective interviews in a conference room near the SAP program office. To allow participants greater flexibility in scheduling, all second interviews were conducted via Zoom.

At the beginning of each interview, students reviewed and signed an informed consent form (see Appendix D). I asked Jane to review and submit her signed consent form via email prior her first interview, but we also reviewed the document together at the start of our conversation. During the first interview, I provided students with a participant information form (see Appendix E) capturing their contact information, educational history, work experience, and demographic information. Students completed this form after the first interview and submitted it to me via email. At the end of the second interview, I confirmed listed contact information with students for the purpose of distributing compensation.

I informed students at the beginning of each interview our conversation would be digitally recorded and I would also take handwritten notes in order to aid my memory. I then provided students an overview of the interview structure and used interview protocols (see Appendices G & H) to facilitate conversation. Although pre-determined interview questions provided guidance in directing the conversation, I also asked follow-up questions to clarify student responses and deepen my understanding. At the end of each interviews, students had the opportunity to share ideas not captured in the interview and to ask me questions. After the second interview, I compensated students with a $20 Amazon gift card sent via email.

After each round of interviews, I used a professional transcription service to transcribe interviews verbatim. I stored electronic transcript files on a password-protected personal computer and handwritten notes in a locked file cabinet.

Student work. I addition to student interviews, I collected written work that addressed what students were doing and learning during their graduate training. Reflective assignments focused on students' professional development and connections between theory and practice are common in student affairs preparation programs, so I sought out work students had already completed in their courses and could easily share with me. I brought up the opportunity to share written work at the beginning of the first interview, while we reviewed the informed consent form, but stressed it was not a requirement of participation in this study. I also highlighted, if students did volunteer to share work, they still maintained complete discretion in what they ultimately chose to share. I reminded students about the opportunity to share written work at the end of the first interview but otherwise did not follow-up with students about sharing work. In the interim between interview rounds, several students emailed written work to me, including a series of reflection papers (which I discuss in greater detail below) and papers they wrote for various classes in the SAP program.

During my initial conversations with SAP students and faculty members, I learned about a professional development seminar students take during their first three semesters in the program. The core assignment for this seminar is a series of monthly reflection papers addressing a range of prompts on professional identity and development (e.g., proficiency in the professional competency areas, transitions to new organizational cultures, supervisor relationships). Several students sent me their reflection papers from this seminar after their first interview, and I found them extremely helpful in illuminating critical moments of learning and

understanding how students were thinking about their graduate training. At the end of their second interviews, I asked the remaining students who had not shared their reflection papers if they would be willing to do so and explained why these materials were particularly useful to my study. All of the remaining students agreed to share these reflection papers with me and sent them to me via email.

Data Analysis

Data analysis in qualitative case study and activity systems analysis is a "process that leads to a thick description of participants, their activities, and the activity setting[s]" (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010, p. 71). Activity system analysis can leverage diverse qualitative analysis strategies, including utilizing *a priori* frameworks and engaging in more inductive constant-comparative analysis (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). In order to explore and describe students' learning environments as activity systems, I used an *a priori* framework derived from the major constructs of Engeström's (1987) Activity Systems Model (subject, tools, object, community, rules, and division of labor) and levels of contradiction (primary, secondary, tertiary, quartenary). In order to explore the kinds of sociocultural forces at play for each participant and how students accessed, used, and adapted tools in their learning environments, I utilized a constant-comparative approach (Corbin & Strauss, 2015), a two-fold technique of identifying concepts within the data and then linking concepts through a careful process of comparing and contrasting.

After collecting data from the aforementioned sources, I began to code data using *a priori* CHAT-oriented constructs (i.e., the activity system elements and levels of contradictions). In developing my understanding of each construct, I used a memo-writing process in which I identified the construct, presented the raw data connected to the construct, and describe my

current thinking and rationale behind the construct. This memo-writing process helped me develop consistent and discrete understandings of concepts (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). As noted earlier, I did preliminary analysis between participants' first and second interviews. Thus, my design allowed for an iterative process of collecting and analyzing data.

Throughout the interwoven processes of data collection and analysis, I compared pieces of raw data against the emerging concepts in order to elaborate and refine my *a priori* and conceptual codes (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). As investigators compare pieces of data and conceptual codes, Corbin and Strauss (2015) recommended they focus on the question: What else is being learning learned about this concept? In exploring this question, investigators solidify the boundaries of the concept and identify possible variances. In this phase of the analysis, the investigator makes comparisons along not only conceptual lines but also theoretical lines (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Later coding completed after the second interview used theoretically informed questions to enrich the coding process (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). For example, while preliminary analysis illuminated tools participants used throughout graduate training, later coding focused on the ways in which tools were accessed, used, and adapted. Doing so supported me in developing a saturated description of relevant activity systems, one that can account for all constructs within the systems. During this stage of analysis, I continued to use a memo-writing process in which I compared and reflected upon pieces of raw data and emerging concepts (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Yamagata-Lynch, 2010).

Ensuring Quality of Research

In designing a qualitative study, the investigator must utilize techniques throughout the research process for safeguarding participants and ensuring trustworthy reporting of data and findings. In this section, I describe strategies I implemented participant safeguards as wells as

strategies for ensuring trustworthy research using Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria for evaluating qualitative inquiry—credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Participant Safeguards

Case study and activity systems analysis require the investigator to become intimately familiar with the experiences and perspectives of study participants (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). Consequently, study participants allow the investigator to not only enter their lives for a brief period of time through interviews and observations but also extrapolate the data from those interactions into more lasting interpretations and meaning. The intrapersonal and interpersonal transactions inherent in qualitative inquiry create situations in which potential for participant harm can never be completely eliminated (Magolda & Weems, 2002). Investigators, then, have the responsibility to consider the harm that may occur throughout all phases of the study and to mitigate that harm when possible by establishing safeguards.

In order to mitigate harm in this study, I explained the process and purpose of the study. I also fully informed all participants of their rights—including how to access and review data collected on them and how to withdraw from the study—and received their consent before collecting any data. I used pseudonyms for participants, the institution, and the preparation program in order to protect privacy. After interviews, participants had the opportunity to review the written transcripts and request alterations as necessary. I stored all electronic data on a private server and keep hard copies of data in a locked file cabinet.

Credibility

This study utilized several methods to ensure credibility, the reader's confidence in the investigator's findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). My study used data triangulation across participant interviews, faculty member interviews, and document analysis to build and confirm

findings (Merriam, 1998). Furthermore, by engaging study participants in multiple interviews, I was able to engage in follow-up conversations in which I asked additional questions and sought further clarification as I developed my interpretive commentary (Johnson, 2002). Participants also engaged in member checking of their interview transcripts and emerging activity systems maps in order to provide ongoing feedback on my analysis (Merriam, 1998).

Transferability

Rather than providing concrete generalizations, qualitative inquiry seeks "patterns for possible transferability and adaptation in new settings" (Patton, 2002, p. 41). Rich description of the case and participants' perspectives serves as the investigator's best tool in conveying transferability of findings. Rich description "enable[s] someone interested in making a transfer to reach a conclusion about whether transfer can be contemplated as a possibility" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 316). My analysis features detailed description of the case and the relevant activity systems students navigate during their graduate preparation.

Dependability

Qualitative inquiry assumes multiple realities constructed through individuals' unique experiences and worldviews and thus problematizes positivist notions of validity as the measurement of consistent findings across time and context (Merriam, 1998). However, qualitative investigators should consider the dependability of their findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In focusing on dependability, the investigator is concerned not with duplicating findings but with ensuring presented results are consistent with the data (Merriam, 1998). In using data triangulation and data analysis memos, I sought to describe in detail the data collection and analysis processes I used throughout this study and to make explicit connections between raw data and emergent themes.

Confirmability

The confirmability of a study highlights the extent to which "findings…are determined by the subjects (respondents) and the conditions of the inquiry and not by the biases, motivations, interests, or perspectives of the inquirer" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290). I leveraged several of the aforementioned techniques to ensure the confirmability of my study. By triangulating findings across multiple sources of data and engaging in member checking, I ensured findings were not shaped through a narrow, singular perspective (Merriam, 1998).

Chapter Summary

This study explored how graduate students enrolled in Master's-level student affairs preparation programs learn to do student affairs work and the ways in which this professional learning is located within, distributed across, and mediated by a particular community. In alignment with the constructivist underpinnings of my worldview and my use of CHAT as a theoretical framework, I conducted a case study and activity system analysis of a Master's-level student affairs preparation program. I collected data through interviews with relevant actors (e.g., students and faculty members) and document analysis of relevant materials (e.g., course syllabi and student work). I used a constant comparative method in order to analyze data, develop maps of students' activity system(s), and guide subsequent and more focused data collection as needed.

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

This chapter is divided into three sections, each addressing one of the sub-questions at the heart of this study. In the first section, I describe each of the participant's activity system(s) maps as a means to identify how their professional learning exists across and is mediated by their unique learning environments. In the second section, I address the participants' stories collectively in describing the social and material tools students access, use, and adapt during their graduate training in order to support their professional learning. In the third section, I highlight particular contradictions that emerge for participants during their graduate training and the ways in which these contradictions shaped participants' professional practice.

Professional Learning in Multiple Activity Systems

CHAT, and by extension activity system analysis, assumes learning emerges from constant activity within and across hyper-specific learning environments. One cannot describe student learning without attending to, in granular detail, the environments in which the student operates. As such, I have chosen to detail each participant's activity system(s) map separately. In doing so, I hope to illuminate the very specific social, cultural, and material conditions from which students' professional learning emerge. Readers will likely see much overlap in students' maps. After all, these individuals occupied many of the same courses, peer groups, and even fieldwork offices. However, their stories highlight how slight variations in the specific connections within and between activity systems can prompt different learning outcomes.

For each student participant, I provide a graphic representation of their activity systems based on my conceptual model. I then provide more detailed description of the components embedded in each system. The individual student serves as the subject at the heart of each map. I forefront the objects—both unique to and shared across specific activity systems—students work

toward in order to highlight the vision of student affairs work participants pursue during their graduate training. I then turn to the remaining activity system constructs (tools, community, division of labor, and rules) and the broader social, cultural, and historical trends surrounding participants.

Jake's Activity System(s) Map

Jake completed his undergraduate studies at a flagship public university on the east coast. Jake was heavily involved in residence life during his undergraduate career and served in multiple leadership roles within both his institution's residence life department and the regional residence life professional association. These positive experiences drove him to pursue a career in student affairs. He applied to and accepted a spot within Brady University's SAP program based on the program's reputation and the opportunity to serve as a residence hall director.

Objects. Jake largely described the objects he pursued during his graduate training as overarching goals rather than specific to either his coursework or his fieldwork experiences. First and foremost, he stressed securing post-graduation employment in an entry-level residence life position at a northeast institution. Jake held this goal prior to starting graduate school and chose to enroll in the SAP program because he felt his fieldwork offer working as a residence hall director would best prepare him to achieve such a position. Jake also discussed becoming a more skilled practitioner as one of his goals for graduate training and often couched that idea within the language of the ACPA and NASPA (2015) *Professional Competency Areas for Student Affairs Educators*. For example, he discussed "becoming way more intentional" with the professional competencies. His use of the professional competency areas as a framework for assessing his practice emerged from their frequent use within his graduate training. In Jake's professional development seminar, for example, students were required on multiple occasions to

assess their competence in each area and connect professional development goals to specific competency areas.

Jake did associate one object, developing greater multicultural competence, with a particular activity system, his coursework:

> [As an undergraduate student] I started recognizing my identities and the impact they hold. So specifically being a White, cisgender, heterosexual man, middle to high SES [socioeconomic status]. I started recognizing what they were, and...I mean I always knew what they were, but never their impact, and so I started exploring that towards the end of my senior year by taking an intentional course about it. And so I knew one of my goals was to come to a program that would expose me and give me opportunities to learn and develop myself as well as developing an understanding and significance of multicultural competence and things like that.

In discussing movement toward this goal, he focused on coursework experiences. He described classroom conversations with peers holding different social identities broadly and the program's required diversity course specifically as the spaces in which he developed multicultural competence. Interestingly, although Jake described pursuing this goal through his coursework, he described enacting multicultural competence in both coursework and fieldwork contexts. For example, he described not only growing cognizance of the limitations of his social perspective during classroom conversations but also introducing a residence hall program intended to help first-year students talk about social identities and privilege.

Tools. Regarding tools he utilized within his coursework activity system, Jake identified courses and course assignments with high perceived relevance to his fieldwork or that stretched his thinking in new ways. For example, he frequently highlighted material from his higher

education law class because of its direct connection to his hall director duties. After learning about due process in class, Jake could see how specific student conduct policies (e.g., scheduling a student meeting within three days of an incident) reflected larger legal obligations around fulfilling contractual relationships. Similarly, his administration course helped him make sense of the complex political relationships he encountered in his fieldwork. When considering his director's decision-making, he now understood how multiple constituencies, both internal and external, and available institutional resources shaped particular decisions even if he disagreed with the ultimate outcome. As Jake encountered puzzling or complicated experiences is his residence life work, academic content gave him language to make sense of and contextualize those experiences within the broader scope of higher education and student affairs work.

Jake also noted how particular course content and assignments allowed him to develop a more complicated sense of self. He entered the SAP program wanting to develop greater multicultural competence and to explore his social identities. Through in-class discussions in his diversity course he encountered "significant amounts of cognitive dissonance and equilibrium," which shaped how he understood his privileged identities. His student development theory course also provided an assignment in which students had to develop narratives through the lens of a different social identity:

> It caused a lot of questions, which is really good. Maybe the purpose of the assignment is challenging how you actually do something like this, and is it even appropriate to do something like that? Trying to put yourself in the shoes of someone who has different identities of yourself. Especially as someone with practically all privileged identities, putting myself in the shoes of someone else, it's practically going to be someone with marginalized identities.

Jake prioritized course content and assignments that challenged his assumptions and required him to think about himself in more complicated ways. In doing so, he felt he had better awareness of how others perceived him in various social and professional contexts and understanding of how to create more equitable learning environments.

Jake's coursework activity system provided a certain degree of latitude in how he engaged in course content and used academic tools to further his professional learning. For example, he had space to guide specific direction of his class assignments and make meaning of course content without having to arrive at any pre-determined answer. In contrast, the tools available to him in his fieldwork activity system were much more prescribed and structured. In order to guide his work as a hall director and comply with departmental policies, Jake often turned to his staff manual:

> There's a lot of structure with that and exactly what to do….That's not only crisis management, but pretty much everything has a process or a duty. So like right now, preparing for closing, everyone's just like, "Go to your hall director manual. Oh you need help budgeting? Hall director manual. Oh you need help with supervising students or job action? The hall director manual."

In working toward goals in his fieldwork—becoming a more competent residence life professional, building his skill set—Jake frequently accessed his staff manual in order to better understand departmental rules and develop action steps by following prescribed plans. The staff manual served as a step-by-step map onto which Jake could project his own professional experiences and decisions.

Even as a graduate student employee, Jake maintained on-call duty responsibilities equivalent to those of his full-time professional counterparts. In this work, he served as first

responder to student crises occurring in residence halls. He identified duty rotations as a powerful experiential tool in both shaping his skills as a professional and deriving a sense of purpose in his work. After initially struggling to feel affirmed in his day-to-day work, Jake's first duty rotation provided a transformative learning moment:

> While responding to a student experiencing suicidal ideation at four in the morning is not the most jolly experience, having that conversation with the student, going into a scenario in which I had no idea what to do, was overwhelmed, and being able to have a conversation with the student and getting to a point where they felt they wanted to go see the 24 hour counseling…I think was really important for me because it made me feel like the work I was doing was good. Then from that point I was able to recognize the impact of my work even if I wasn't being affirmed, and I was able to advocate for affirmation and validation more.

Duty rotations provided Jake with practical experience in handling difficult situations that are nevertheless common within residence life work. He felt more confident in his interpersonal skills and ability to manage students in crisis. Duty rotations also enabled him to resituate himself in relation to organizational culture and the unspoken rules of the department. Whereas he characterized the residence life department as a space in which skilled performance without affirmation was expected, Jake used his experiences on-duty to challenge the appropriateness of these norms and to better advocate for his own personal and professional needs.

Community. SAP faculty members and cohort-mates comprised Jake's community, or the social others who also occupy the learning environment, within the coursework activity system. His fieldwork activity system, however, contained more sizeable and diverse community members. He identified the director of residence life, his direct supervisor (a full-time hall

director), resident advisors, desk clerks, and undergraduate residents as members of his fieldwork community with whom he interacted.

Division of labor. In coursework contexts, Jake described faculty members as facilitators in charge of designing courses and fostering conversation. “I feel like faculty do a lot of facilitation,” he noted, “So setting us up to have conversations ourselves, or set us up to engage in an activity, or set us up to present on something.” Consequently, students were expected to be active participants within classroom sessions. Jake noted most classroom sessions across his courses relied on students presenting core concepts from the week’s readings to each other and then engaging in sustained conversation.

Within Jake’s fieldwork context, the residence life department provided clear expectations regarding division of labor and Jake’s specific responsibilities as a graduate assistant. The department emphasized treating graduate students as professionals and, as such, Jake was the primary authority figure in the day-to-day operations of his residence hall. Jake supervised the resident assistants and desk clerks who work within his residence hall and attends to conduct violations regarding his residents. He additionally served in the on-duty rotation with full-time professional staff members. Jake’s division of labor with his direct supervisor John (pseudonym), a full-time residence hall director, similarly embodied the departmental focus on treating graduate assistants as “real” professionals. Jake noted John and he equally divided the work between the two residence halls comprising their community; Jake attended to all the responsibilities in his building, and John did the same with his.

Rules. Jake saw SAP faculty members as the primary sources of the formal rules governing coursework spaces. Faculty members design the program curriculum, which Jake noted carries messages about what the faculty see as more essential or less essential knowledge

for students to encounter. (He explained, for example, the program does not require a budgeting or finance course, which he saw as a major limitation in the curriculum.) Faculty members are also responsible setting many of the formal rules for individual classes, such as dictating what materials students read, what students do during class sessions, and what assignments students complete outside of class. Although he could not identify the SAP program's officially stated values, Jake saw faculty members generally bringing expectations around challenge and support to their courses:

> [Faculty members want to] create inclusive environments for education, create challenging environments, to avoid comfort and escaping difficult conversations. I think support is a huge, huge one. Whether it is done in ways people need that support is one thing, but I do feel everyone is supportive. And it's highly emphasized people support….They value critical thinking and challenging and moving against the status quo.

These perceived values translated into specific practices faculty members employed in their classrooms, such as stressing peer-to-peer discussion and creating opportunities for students to dialogue across lines of difference.

Although Jake focused heavily on faculty members as rule-makers, interpersonal dynamics amongst cohort-mates played a significant role in determining the informal rules governing classroom spaces. He explained his cohort "came in really strong" but had faced significant interpersonal conflict especially connected to their required diversity course in their first year together:

> I feel one section was facilitated well. The other section from what I've heard, the section I was not in, was facilitated poorly…. I think our cohort is doing a lot of

> developing, and when we have conversations with one another, I think last year was very difficult to have conversations without feeling attacked. So, I think our level of maturity and development was not where it could have been.

As such, students remained hesitant to be fully vulnerable and collaborative with each other during class sessions. “When it comes to classrooms, some people interact with each other, some don’t,” Jake stated, “There are some unresolved issues I think from last year that impact how people talk in classrooms.” During his interview in the spring, Jake explained peer-to-peer interactions in coursework were still not overly collaborative or vulnerable but were perhaps less overtly contentious. When asked about conflict within the cohort, he said:

> I think it's lessened, but I think it's because we've disengaged more…. I think we've all kind of just started going our own separate ways. I don't necessarily feel that [interpersonal] connection with other anymore. That might just be me as a human and just kind of like what I've needed to do in order to be successful, but I think there's still some tension, but it's the tension we don't talk about. I just don't think people see each other outside of class. We tried doing a cohort lunch two weeks [ago] and the only people that showed up were me and [my partner]…. A lot of people have just given up on building ourselves up as a cohort. So, I think because of that we just kind of have moved on, and if there was tension or things we needed to talk about, they've just kind of fizzled because we don't really do anything together.

As students planned to exit the SAP program and move on to new roles and institutions, informal rules around cohort dynamics began to shift. Whereas cohort-mates had formerly seen value in establishing strong bonds and “fixing” persistent interpersonal conflict, they ultimately became resigned to living with some degree of tension with and distance from one another.

In his fieldwork system, Jake identified the Office of Residence Life as the central source of formal rules governing his work. The office's central staff provided strict guidance on the nature and scope of Jake's work in the form of a hall director manual. The manual provided policies on all facets of Jake's responsibilities, including crisis management, facilities management, budgeting, and hall opening and closing operations. As such, Jake perceived little ambiguity in the rules he was expected to play by in his graduate assistantship. To a certain extent, he felt confined by the rigidity of the position and lack of "room for creativity." However, Jake also found these highly formalized structures and processes useful to his professional development. "I'm already good at this creative thing," Jake explained, "And forcing me to sit down and become stronger administratively is helping me for my future."

The office's central staff also created and reinforced informal rules governing validation, or lack thereof, for work done. Jake noted, although the department had high expectations for how work should be completed, he felt little affirmation for the work he did. Instead, he explained, "When you're doing a good job, you'll just get more work." When employee work did not meet expectations, the department's central staff liberally used action plans, a form of probation, to correct behavior. Indeed, returning graduate assistants told Jake he should not feel surprised or offended if he was placed on an action plan by the end of his first semester. Jake noted the office's new director was aware of the department's "culture of fear" and actively working to make employee's feel more validated in their work.

Broader sociocultural trends. More immediate organizational cultures—those of the SAP program and the Office of Residence Life—shaped how Jake experienced his graduate training. From the beginning of his graduate school search, Jake had heard about the quality and competitiveness of Brady's SAP program and felt confident in his decision to attend the

institution. He received messages from both internal members of the program and external constituencies familiar with or alumni of SAP about the strength of the program and its ability to produce strong student affairs practitioners. As he progressed throughout his graduate coursework, Jake began to question the nature of the program reputation:

> I still don't know exactly what the reputation of [the SAP program] means. So when people say, “Oh, you go to [Brady]. What's it like?” I'm like, I think it's a good program. I think it's helped me grow. But is it good at ensuring jobs? Is it good at creating strong professionals?

He noted, especially, how impressions of the program depended on the specific nature of each cohort of students. In his mind, one could not speak to the culture of the SAP program without addressing the interpersonal dynamics of their own cohort.

He described the culture of his own cohort as one marked by underlying tensions. Whereas the cohort had begun their first year as a “strong” unit, conflict flared toward the end of the year as they navigated their required diversity course. Jake noted how difficult it was for students to engage with each other in classes, especially around sensitive subjects, without feeling attacked. These tensions caused members of the cohort community to disengage from one another both in class and out of class. Toward the end of his second year, Jake felt most members of his cohort were already looking toward life beyond the SAP program. “You need to exert effort to feel like you're a part of the cohort,” he explained, “And if you need that time to be separate or you don't want to engage, you will feel isolated.” Although overt conflicts were less prevalent, students had resigned themselves to a handful of close connections rather than building strong relationships across the cohort. Jake felt these interpersonal dynamics ultimately

shaped how students engaged in classes and affected the extent to which students felt comfortable to share with one another during group discussions.

In approaching a residence life office with different philosophies and administrative approaches than that of his undergraduate institution, Jake learned both technical skills and more adaptive processes for navigating new organizational cultures. He explained:

> Transitioning to a new department that has different approaches to administrating and solving issues has not been easy. I am challenged with comparing old practices and procedures that shaped the foundation of my higher education experience with new concepts from the administration at [Brady]. I would not classify it as anything that is impacting me negatively, but it has been eye-opening to learn how a rural, public university similar to [my undergraduate institution] administrates differently. For example, the Office of Residence Life at [Brady] tends to be innovative with their practices, specifically the programming model used in the residence halls.

Jake explained how he had adapted to this initially unfamiliar programming model and found new ways of engaging resident assistants aligned with the model. He also articulated the transition from one programming model to another would prepare him for professional work after graduate school. “I do recognize though that any time I switch universities, this type of transition will occur,” he acknowledged, “And understanding what I need to be successful in the new environment is something I am working toward understanding.”

The larger culture of Brady University, especially the aspects of this institutional culture that differed from his undergraduate institution, also shaped Jake’s graduate training. He noted, for example, how prominently Christianity figured in the lives of Brady University students compared to the higher education environments he encountered in his home state. Students

openly discussed and regularly practiced their faith on campus. This cultural shift not only created internal dissonance and new meaning making for Jake but also required him to interact with students in new ways. He engaged in conversations on sensitive topics (e.g., diversity and inclusion, sexual assault) with students who shared widely varying viewpoints.

Jake noted how specific sociopolitical moments, namely the presidential campaign and election of Donald Trump in 2016, shaped the emotional and intellectual tenor of both the institution at large and the SAP program. The highly divisive nature of the campaign and election "created tension between groups of people" and spurred student activism and debate. A year after the election, he still felt campus was "so hot right now." This specific sociopolitical moment, which in turn shaped the climate of the institution, provided Jake with opportunities and challenges. He felt emphasized commitment to and relevance in developing multicultural competence and had many chances to use practical skills related to facilitating dialogue and talking across lines of difference. However, these conversations had the potential to turn divisive and destructive. He noted the charged political climate shaped interactions with both undergraduate students and amongst his cohort. He experienced many charged conversations in his preparation program classes, especially those related to issues of diversity, and did "not believe there [were] resources available or actions taken to appropriately support students and staff process[ing] through it." The reverberations of sociopolitical upheaval at all levels of his graduate training experience created a learning environment in which Jake consistently encountered challenging conversations. The extent to which Jake felt prepared for and supported in those conversations, however, varied greatly depending on the exact context in which conversations occurred. He understood the importance of working through conflict but also craved additional support in how to productively process interpersonal challenges.

Ann's Activity System(s) Map

Ann grew up and completed her undergraduate studies on the west coast. As an undergraduate student, she participated in a number of cocurricular experiences connected to student affairs work, including orientation, student government, Greek life, and residence life. Immediately after graduating she spent two years as a coordinator for her state system's residential hub on the east coast and oversaw residential living for students completing domestic study abroad and internship programs. Ann knew she would need to eventually pursue a Master's degree in order to progress in the field and sought out opinions from colleagues about programs that should be on her radar. The Brady University SAP program figured frequently in these conversations, prompting her to apply. She chose SAP over another equally competitive program because of a "magical fit"—prompted by the chance to work in student conduct, a new functional area for her, and strong connections she made with program faculty during her campus visit.

Objects. On a practical level, Ann pursued a Master's degree because she knew it would be crucial to further career progression and earning a larger salary. "That [earning the degree] is a very big motivation as well," she explained, "Because obviously I want to help students, and this [student affairs work] is a passion, but…I'd like to complete a Master's to earn a better salary too." Completing the program would earn her certain credentials needed to make her more legitimate and competitive within the student affairs job market.

On a more conceptual level, however, she sought to develop a more complex understanding of the profession and her role as a practitioner. "I definitely want to further my education and become more aware of the field," Ann noted, "Not only in a practitioner sense but in an academic sense too." She was attracted to Brady because of the opportunity to work within

student conduct for the first time. Additionally, she completed several practica experiences with Brady's leadership development office. As I will discuss in greater depth when detailing the tools Ann accessed and used, several academic experiences—notably a course on postsecondary teaching—were especially salient in helping her make the most of her professional work in these contexts. She cited these intersections of academic content and professional practice as especially powerful moments of professional learning during her graduate training. In combination with her previous full-time work in residence life, Ann felt her various fieldwork experiences, complemented by particular academic experiences, provided a more holistic picture of the profession and made her a better-rounded practitioner.

Embedded within this desire to learn more about the profession was also a goal to continue enacting her personal and professional values. Ann entered the SAP program with an already established sense of professional ethics and philosophy of how to work with students:

> Sometimes I don't feel like I'm learning anything because I think if you are practicing…I don't know, as a just and ethical person, I think that it just makes sense that this is how you would practice student affairs and how you'd understand it. The research we're reading—it's like, well, yeah. That's how you treat students. You make them feel like they matter. That's just how you treat people.

Nevertheless, she also articulated a need to continually practice this professional philosophy in new organizational and interpersonal contexts. For example, her work in student conduct provided fresh challenge in how to interact with students in a way that felt intentional and genuine. "I don't want [students going through the conduct process] to feel as if the only time the university is going to notice them is when they're in trouble," Ann explained, "So whether I'm in a conduct hearing or teaching a leadership class, I really strive to make every interaction

genuine." In addition to broadening her perspective, Ann also sought to maintain a core sense of self that guided professional actions.

Tools. Similar to Jake, Ann focused on coursework system tools with high perceived relevance to her fieldwork activities. Admitting most of her courses felt like "checklist items"—activities she simply needed to cross off her to-do list—Ann frankly discussed the limitations of coursework in informing her professional practice. She felt her professional values and skills had changed very little as a result of her coursework, and instead ideas from classes (e.g., developmental theories) had confirmed rather than challenged what she already knew about working with students. However, she repeatedly highlighted two courses—one on higher education law, one on college teaching—which had deepened her professional knowledge because of their connections to various fieldwork activities. For example, content from the law course helped Ann understand the rationale undergirding student conduct policies such as evidentiary standards and due process. Similarly, her college teaching seminar provided practical facilitation tips she could immediately apply to an undergraduate leadership development course she was teaching in that same semester.

When asked to consider the tools she used to learn about student affairs work, Ann readily identified fieldwork as the space in which she experienced new learning. This environment contained material tools—the university's code of conduct, incident reporting software, calendar software—Ann leveraged in her day-to-day work as a conduct office. More so, however, she identified conceptual and experiential tools especially relevant to her professional learning and goal to become a more skilled, more holistic practitioner. For example, she stressed interpersonal competency as a tool she relied on frequently in her fieldwork:

Having relational competency is an important tool I think that I use every day not in

> terms of just my student interactions but also in maintaining a positive work environment. We also share an office with different departments, and I'm interacting with different people, from dean of students, assistant dean of students, associate deans of students, then to grads, to students, to custodial workers. There is an emphasis on forming relationships with everyone and then maintaining those relationships. It's helpful when you need something from someone and you would like their help, or they're asking you to help.

Interpersonal skills enabled Ann to engage with the broad range of institutional actors she encountered in her fieldwork and to navigate the political channels so crucial to succeeding in her division.

Experiential opportunities, namely facilitating conduct hearings, also served as a tool for helping Ann hone her professional skills. She noted her internship experiences were "invaluable" in helping her learn about student conduct as a potential functional area to work in and practice new professional responsibilities. Conduct hearings allowed Ann to interface with students in unexpected and "powerful" ways. "They have nothing left to do except be vulnerable and trust you that you have their best interests at heart," she explained in reference to students facing potential suspension. In facilitating conduct hearings, Ann adapted what could have very easily been a transactional, standardized policy procedure into a reflective moment for both students and herself. Students, in some cases, left those meetings with greater insight into their personal choices and consequences of those choices. Ann used those meetings to cement her professional values and practice complex interpersonal skills.

Community. Ann's coursework activity system included program faculty members and cohort-mates. She built particularly strong relationships with several faculty members who figured more prominently in her discussion of academic activities and whom she relied on for

guidance and professional wisdom. Her fieldwork activity system included members of her own office as well as professionals in other offices within immediately physical proximity to the student conduct office. The student conduct office contained two full-time professionals, Taylor and Matthew, who rotated as Ann's supervisors between her first and second year and several other graduate assistants. Several other student affairs offices occupied spaces immediately adjacent to the conduct office, and Ann frequently interacted with full-time professionals and graduate assistants in those offices too. Interestingly, both of Ann's supervisors within student conduct were relatively recent graduates of the SAP program. Thus, her communities across coursework and fieldwork systems blurred in unique ways. For example, her supervisors recommended particular elective courses to her and allowed her to borrow certain academic materials such as textbooks.

Division of labor. In academic contexts, Ann noted faculty members generally served as guides or facilitators throughout class sessions and the program was "very into active learning." Within this broad categorization of the faculty members' role, she noted some variations depending on course content and teaching style preferences. The introductory and student development theory courses, for example, still utilized student discussions but included much more lecturing than other courses. "There's only so much you can do with discussion-based when the professor isn't telling you what the theories and what the foundations are," Ann explained. She also noted how individual instructors would "live and die by" their particular teaching style. While some relied solely on dialogue-based teaching strategies, others felt much more comfortable lecturing and providing fewer opportunities for student discussion.

In response to how faculty members conceptualized their role in the classroom and their specific teaching strategies (i.e., emphasizing active learning), students were responsible for

actively participating in class sessions. Active participation took form in individual self-reflection, partnering with peers or the whole class to discuss course material, and collaborating with peers on course projects outside of class. Faculty members made themselves available to students both in-class and out-of-class, but Ann also noted students needed to take the initiative in fostering deeper connections with faculty members. For example, she initiated regular meetings with a faculty member whom she sought out for professional advice beyond the particularities of her coursework.

Within Ann's fieldwork, the student conduct office created a sequenced graduate assistant experience designed to give Ann exposure to and practical experience in conduct administration. Most of Ann's work revolved around her role as a conduct hearing officer—preparing for one-on-one meetings with students, facilitating meetings, and completing follow-up tasks after meetings. She also had smaller administrative tasks associated with the office's daily functioning, such as checking the local police blotter for any incidents involving Brady students. In her first year, Ann worked with and was supervised by Taylor in adjudicating conduct cases involving residence halls; in her second year, she worked with and was supervised by Matthew in adjudicating university-wide conduct cases. Ann explained this system of job responsibilities worked well because she developed foundational skills during her first year she could then build upon during her second year. She also noted her office was intentional in ensuring she only worked 20 hours per week as stated in her graduate assistant contract.

However, Ann did highlight a unique experience that occurred during the spring semester of her first year, which greatly affected her job responsibilities for several months. Her co-graduate assistant, a second-year student in the SAP program, received a job offer earlier than anticipated and left Brady before the end of the year. As a result, Ann took over the job

responsibilities of both graduate assistants at the request of her supervisors. “By the time that I was able to recognize this is too much for one person, it was almost the end of the semester, and what's really gonna change?” she stated, “That was a huge dilemma, but really good learning experience.” Despite this jarring shift in responsibilities, Ann noted many positives outcomes from this time in her position. She felt she proved her worth to her colleagues and her supervisors sought her out for additional opportunities because they knew she could handle additional responsibilities.

Rules. Ann’s story highlights tensions between formal and informal rules in both academic and fieldwork activity systems. In academic contexts, Ann saw faculty members grounding their decision-making about curriculum and instructional methods in a commitment to holistic and autonomous professionals. This sentiment aligned with the SAP program’s own espoused values, which focus on fostering reflective practitioners with solid understanding of their personal and professional values. We're not just coming into the [SAP] machine and then all leaving the same,” Ann explained, “They really do value our independence and our unique identities.” However, unspoken rules between cohort-mates occasionally got in the way of making connections in the classroom. From Ann’s perspective, students had strong feelings about who could be trusted and how their perspectives would be interpreted during class sessions. This climate caused students to disengage from classroom conversations, thus potentially impeding faculty members’ efforts to generate meaningful learning experiences that would transform students’ professional practice.

In fieldwork contexts, Ann’s supervisors set formal rules regarding her specific job responsibilities and office policies such as how to adjudicate student conduct cases. Within the confines of her specific office, Ann felt these formal, stated rules governed much of her activity.

However, she noted how informal "shady politics" often dictated how the larger division operated. "We tell our students that there are so many ways to advocate for yourself and be empowered in these very transparent ways," she said, "But in reality, we ourselves are navigating all of these sneaky pathways in order to gain power in our positions. That's very real here at [Brady]." Ann saw these politics lived out in mid-level professional publicly currying favor from senior administrators whom they privately disparaged. She noted how organizational mobility within her division often depended on one's ability to leverage these informal, interpersonal connections, and individuals who could not or would not ultimately left the institution. "Move up or move out," she quipped.

Broader sociocultural trends. Similar to Jake, layers of social and cultural trends shaped Ann's experiences and opportunities for learning while in graduate school. She noted how persistent tensions amongst her cohort affected how she navigated academic spaces and engaged with her peers. She felt students became uncomfortable talking about difficult topics with one another during their first year because "there was a lot of challenging. Not challenging in a supportive way. Just challenging in a 'shut you down' kind of way." In the second year these interpersonal tensions manifested as apathy. Ann explained:

> People don't really listen or care about each other anymore. And so we care about the subject, and we're going through the motions because we need to go through the motions in order to get to the end of the semester. But we're not engaging with each other because we want to be engaging with each other.

Ann herself acknowledged she engaged in this distancing from peers. "I'm like, 'I will champion you all from afar.' We don't need to be best friends. We just need to be civil in classes together." As she looked toward the end of graduation, she recognized several close friendships she had

built but otherwise noted her cohort-mates kept each other at arms-length when engaging in academic material.

Ann described the culture of her fieldwork office as personally and professionally supportive of graduate assistants. She felt both of the full-time professionals in her office cared deeply about providing a thoughtful educational experience that would contribute to Ann's skill-set and enable her to seek student conduct positions after graduation. Rather than focusing solely on Ann's responsibilities as a graduate assistant, her supervisors provided a more holistic learning environment that blurred academic and fieldwork priorities. For example, Ann turned to Taylor for advice on selecting particular courses and navigating her job search. Ann felt her supervisors would "go to bat for [her]" and made sure she had a voice in organizational decision-making. "I think that's a valuable lesson that I have taken away," she noted, "If I am ever in a position at that level, or higher, I want to be that person for the people who don't have as much of a voice or as much power too." Ann, in turn, sought to maintain this office culture as she progressed throughout the SAP program. During her second year, she "told [the new first-year graduate assistant] very explicitly, 'I will always go to bat for you before I go to bat for anyone else.'" The immediate organizational culture of her fieldwork office positively contributed to Ann's professional learning while at Brady and also set a vision for the professional values Ann sought to embody in her future work.

Ann also highlighted how staffing changes in the senior administrator who oversaw student conduct and several other functional areas influenced her fieldwork experiences and the lessons she learned about organizational politics. She explained how her office and several adjacent offices maintained a culture of "treating graduate students as professionals" by ensuring graduate students were given meaningful responsibilities and opportunity to share their

perspectives. She associated this organizational culture with positive contributions to her professional development and general satisfaction with her fieldwork placement. “This [the office culture] especially mattered for me because I had been working professionally,” she explained, “I didn’t want to come back into a space and be taught with gloves on.” The new senior administrator, however, came with a reputation of “not caring about grads.” Although she saw this administrator slowly adapting to the new organizational culture he now oversaw, Ann remained frustrated by the mixed messages graduate students received within the division. She noted, “There's still that divide in terms of which staff members are seeing graduate students as just graduate students and then which staff members are treating graduate students as professional staff members, and it's so varied in that experience.”

Akin to Jake’s discussion about national politics shaping campus climate, Ann too discussed how political tensions shaped her day-to-day experiences but located those tensions within the broader community Brady occupied rather than institutional boundaries. She noted the small town in which Brady is located was difficult to live in for a person of Color, especially as someone accustomed to living in much more racially diverse metropolitan communities. She explained:

> I’ve never really felt how different my skin tone can set me apart until these two years….Within a week of being here I was told to not go past the [grocery store several miles from campus] because there are still members of the KKK [Ku Klux Klan] who live in that area.

Although she felt safe on campus, Ann remained conscious of “having to navigate a political climate where everything has been so hyper-aware of race.” For example, she often avoided being off campus without a companion. These experiences required Ann to compartmentalize

her graduate school experiences, focusing on parts of her work she enjoyed and rationalizing she would eventually leave the less desirable parts behind her.

Dexter's Activity System(s) Map

Dexter completed his undergraduate studies at Brady University, where he participated in a variety of student leadership positions including serving as a resident assistant and running several student organizations. For two years, he worked in a sales position at Brady before deciding he needed a career change. Although he wanted to experience a new institutional setting, Dexter applied to the SAP program because of its reputation and its fieldwork requirements. He ultimately chose to stay at Brady and complete the SAP program because of his fieldwork offer in the career services office and the opportunities, he perceived, would give him the practical experience needed to land his dream job working in student athlete services.

Objects. One of Dexter's primary goals was to engage in work he found meaningful and fulfilling. In discussing this goal, Dexter often relied on his pre-graduate school work as counterpoint to his current ambitions. He completed his undergraduate studies in secondary education but discerned through a rather difficult student teaching experience he did not want to pursue a full-time teaching career. The sales position provided employment stability, but Dexter wanted something more. "I really want to have purpose in what I do," he reflected, "And really make a difference with students. You can see it a little bit more clearly than working in sales, so that's what brought me back to student affairs." Dexter eventually settled on a career in student affairs because it allowed him to serve and connect to students—factors that had led him to pursue his undergraduate degree in education—in different, more sustainable ways than he previously imagined.

In more practical terms, Dexter wanted to secure a job working in student athlete services, which provides primarily academic support services (e.g., advising, tutoring) to college student athletes. Consequently, he focused on accruing as much experience as possible that would enable him to secure a full-time position in this functional area post-graduation. He explained, “At the end of the day I feel as if you need to have that experience when you're looking for the jobs. Like, I'm looking at jobs, and that's what they're looking for.” In addition to his fieldwork placement in career services, Dexter took on additional practica experiences with Brady’s athletics department working with student athletes in order to gain more direct experience working in his desired functional area.

Tools. Dexter acknowledged coursework had not been his main priority during his first year of graduate training for several reasons. First, he struggled to make connections between the student development theories he learned about his class and his interactions with students in the career services office, which were often transient and transactional. Second, he saw experiential knowledge as more valuable than theoretical knowledge in terms of securing post-graduation employment:

> When I’m applying for the jobs I want…the assumption is I don't think I'm going to get questions on, “So tell me about all these different theories that you learned. How do these apply to your job?” Like, no. They're going to want to know what experience you have working with these groups of students, what has been successful, are you familiar with this type of technology.

Dexter recognized, however, he needed to put more effort into his academic experiences. Doing so, he believed, would allow him to make better connections between coursework and fieldwork even when those connections were not obvious. In his second year of graduate school, he also

saw how concepts built upon each other. He bemoaned, “I'm just like, ‘Man, if I would have done just a little more reading, maybe these theories or these concepts would make more sense.’” More so than any other participant, Dexter struggled to see the relevance of coursework to his professional practice.

Despite these challenges to engaging in coursework, he did identify several academic experiences that provided meaningful learning. He especially highlighted a course on campus environments, the content of which he felt was “just applicable everywhere.” Whereas he struggled to put other theoretical knowledge to use in his day-to-day practice, Dexter more easily saw environmental theories and principles at play. More broadly, he discussed opportunities across courses to reflect on what he was learning in classes and doing in his fieldwork. In his group advising seminar, Dexter discussed various areas of professional development with a small group of his peers. In his student development theory and diversity courses, he wrote reflection papers on course content. His diversity course also utilized online discussion forums in which students reflected upon and responded to weekly readings. Dexter felt these multiple modes of reflection allowed some of his “uncooked thoughts” around areas he felt vulnerable in (e.g., conversations about social justice) to become stronger and more coherent.

In his fieldwork activity system, Dexter stressed tools that provided him with tangible and transferable skills he could bring to his job search and post-graduation employment. In identifying the tools he used in his fieldwork, he remarked, “Just getting the experience. I'm all about trying to get that experience, whether it be with technology or face-to-face in advising appointments.” Experience, for Dexter, meant engaging in the work firsthand and building up a resume of concrete involvement in various facets of work. This desire for experience pushed him to pursue work not only in his career services graduate assistantship but also in additional

practica with Brady's athletics department. In each of these spaces, he sought out responsibilities that directly paralleled the responsibilities he foresaw for himself in full-time employment. For example, he found opportunities for high contact (e.g., advising and tutoring) with student athletes so that he could speak to directly working with this student population in future student athlete services job interviews. In his graduate assistantship, Dexter highlighted opportunities to shadow assistant directors in executing special projects. He felt these opportunities gave him a more realistic understanding of the field so that he would not be "blindsided when [he was] expected to do the good, bad, and ugly [as] a professional."

Community. Dexter's coursework activity system included cohort-mates and program faculty members. Dexter noted, whereas other students frequently spent time with faculty members outside of class, he primarily interacted with faculty members during scheduled course times. Similarly, one of his cohort-mates served as a close friend, but otherwise he did not socialize extensively with members of his cohort. His fieldwork activity system included the director of career services, several assistant directors, several other first- and second-year graduate assistants, and undergraduate student workers. In Dexter's first year, each graduate assistant reported to a different assistant director, but reporting chains shifted during his second year so that all graduate assistants reported to the same assistant director. As such, Dexter had a different direct supervisor across his first and second year.

Division of labor. Similar to other participants, Dexter described faculty members as responsible for facilitation and students as responsible for active participation during class sessions. Although each faculty member had a unique teaching style and particular go-to pedagogical practices, they all framed themselves as partners in learning rather than as expert authorities. Nevertheless, Dexter did perceive a degree of power differential between faculty

members and students: “Obviously they're not equal [to us]….I mean, they're the teacher. That's their job.” Faculty members had the power, and responsibility, to shape the content and tenor of specific class sessions through the teaching practices they utilized and how they asked students to participate in the learning process. For example, some faculty members often asked students to converse in small groups before facilitating a whole-group dialogue. Other faculty members required students to divvy up weekly readings and then teach each other about key concepts from their selected materials. Although Dexter preferred certain methods over others—for example, calling the student-teaching-student model simply “regurgitating information”—he saw those decisions as part of faculty members’ positional authority.

Students were responsible for engaging in the pedagogical experiences faculty members designed. Because the SAP faculty members emphasized active learning in their teaching philosophy, students frequently engaged in small- and large-group discussions, reflected on instructor-designed questions, and facilitated presentations on specific topics related to the particular course. Interestingly, Dexter noted instances in which students provided critical feedback to faculty members about their teaching practices. However, in discussing these moments, he distanced himself from the actions of his peers. For example, regarding the course that relied heavily on a student-teaching-student model, he noted, “There's been a lot of grief from, or a lot of feedback from, my peers that are like, ‘We aren't getting anything out of this. This isn't beneficial.’” Even though Dexter himself did not appreciate the teaching practice, he located actions overtly critiquing the student-teaching-student model outside of himself. More than other participants, Dexter saw positional authority as a central force in shaping the division of labor in the classroom. Faculty members were responsible for teaching; students were responsible for following the faculty members’ lead.

In fieldwork contexts, Dexter highlighted changes in his specific job responsibilities between his first and second year. During his first year, Dexter supervised his office's front desk and handled walk-in appointments. He also assisted assistant directors on special projects and programming. For example, he helped execute a career fair for employers in various government roles. During his second year, Dexter co-supervised the office's student ambassador program, which gave him more consistent exposure to student leader supervision. Dexter and Jane (a participant in this study and fellow second-year graduate assistant in the career services office) were also tasked with initiating, planning, and executing a unique program in order to provide them with more substantive programming experience. They designed a career fair for jobs in a variety of public service and education roles. Across both years, Dexter facilitated one-on-one student appointments, primarily reviewing resumes and cover letters, and helped maintain the office's online employer/employee portal.

Rules. Like other participants, Dexter perceived the rules of his coursework context as derived from two sources—the formal rules put in place by faculty members and the informal rules enforced by contentious cohort dynamics. Faculty members, he described, put emphasis on theoretical knowledge, social justice, and reflection. Each of these areas connected to a broader goal of getting students to understand themselves and their work in new ways. Dexter noted, "They want students to think outside the box and really think about different perspectives." Dexter saw these formal rules and priorities lived out in how faculty members conceived both the program curriculum and the pedagogical practices used in individual courses. For example, he discussed how all of his classes touched on some form of theory (e.g., developmental, organizational, environmental) and included multiple modes for students to engage in reflection, such as group discussions facilitated in class and reflection papers completed outside of class.

Dynamics amongst members of the cohort, however, mediated how individuals engaged with one another in classroom and out-of-classroom spaces. Like other participants, Dexter characterized his cohort as one marked by tension. For example, he highlighted the conflicts that emerged throughout his diversity course:

> It was rough. We were brutal. We were brutal with one another. I'm being frank and honest. It was not good. People were calling each other out, not appropriately, very passive aggressively. It was a lot of students feeling the things being taught in the class were redundant to them. To me it wasn't. It was new to me, a lot of the stuff.

Although other courses proceeded much more uneventfully, tensions amongst cohort-mates permeated their relationships outside of class. “The cohort before us deemed our cohort competitive, so that title was thrown around a lot,” he explained, “I think people started living up to that name, so our cohort can be very cliquey.” Perceptions of competition and hostility influenced how Dexter participated with his peers. He had one close friend in the cohort but otherwise did not socialize extensively with his cohort-mates. During class, he felt more comfortable sharing in small groups where he could practice stating his ideas rather than having to articulate himself in larger, more public arenas.

In his fieldwork context, Dexter spoke frequently about espoused and enacted policies put in place to ensure graduate assistants fulfilled their job responsibilities and gained professional development without being overworked. “We work our 20 hours,” he explained, “And then if we go over, they [full-time staff members] are like, ‘You need to leave.’ They're very mindful of us being grad students, so I'm thankful for.” Whereas other departments expected graduate assistants to put in additional hours in order to meet the demands of their

positions, the professionals in the career services office ensured graduate assistants did not. Additionally, Dexter described his superiors as "very transparent" about their work and that they assigned work that would contribute to the graduate assistants' professional development. "They have literally told us, 'I want to make sure that every experience that you get here is a new bullet point on your resume so that you can talk about all these different, diverse experiences that you're having,'" he explained. Dexter perceived his supervisors were "grooming [him]" for his upcoming job search. Whereas other participants felt varying degrees of tension between the espoused and enacted rules of their office or division, Dexter felt he knew the rules by which he was expected to play. Furthermore, he agreed with these rules and thought they contributed to rather than hindered his professional development.

Broader sociocultural trends. Whereas other participants discussed reacting and adapting to Brady University as a new social and organizational context, Dexter did not experience this transition. He did not intend to stay at Brady—and, indeed, received advice from multiple mentors to move to a different institution—but program reputation and job opportunities kept him at the institution. "I've been [at Brady] since 2010," he noted, "So I didn't have that transition. Like living in a new place. I didn't have to worry about that transition." Although graduate training required Dexter to adapt to some new contexts (e.g., graduate coursework, the career services office), dimensions of the larger institutional culture that created so much dissonance for other students—the rural setting, the more conservative student body—were simply part of life's backdrop.

Dexter also perceived shifts in the SAP program faculty members as a factor in shaping his professional experience. For example, he highlighted how the departure of a "very prominent and up-and-coming" faculty member had created challenges for the program in the short- and

long-term. In the short-term, the program relied heavily on new faculty members, who had in some instances never taught particular subject matter before, and on retired faculty, who in Dexter's eyes were not fully committed to being back in the classroom. These circumstances caused Dexter to feel his cohort was "getting the short end of the stick" regarding the academic preparation. In the long-term, he felt "just replenishing the talent [would] be tough" for the program to accomplish. Dexter chose to remain at Brady primarily because of the SAP program's reputation and highlighted national alumni presence as a major strength for the program. That reputation, however, no longer felt certain as the program dealt with a series of staffing changes.

Jane's Activity System(s) Map

Jane completed her undergraduate studies in psychology at a large public university in the southeast. During her undergraduate career she participated heavily in multicultural affairs organizations. Dissatisfied with the career prospects for an undergraduate psychology degree and not interested in pursuing graduate work in the field, she sought other options. Mentors at her undergraduate institution ultimately introduced her to student affairs as a potential career path. Jane applied to Brady's SAP program because of its national reputation and at the recommendation of SAP alumni at her undergraduate institution. However, during her graduate school search, she gravitated toward a different program. When she did not receive an offer from that other program and passed the graduate school admission deadline, she reached back out to the SAP program for reconsideration. After another round of interviews, she received an assistantship offer from the career services office and accepted. "[A]bout five days before I walked across the stage, I found out I was moving to [Brady]," she quipped.

Objects. Similar to other participants, Jane's primary goal was to secure a full-time position in her preferred functional area, career services, after graduating from the SAP program. She connected securing a job loosely with her professional development, but the act of securing a job—receiving an offer, signing a contract—remained at the forefront of her mind. "I know there are those competencies that we always want to build, but it's not always easy to categorize things I think in those list of competencies," she acknowledged, "My goal really is just to find a job." Similarly, she wanted to continue doing well in her class, which she defined as completing readings and earning high grades on assignments, but this too served the larger goal of job placement. Doing well in classes allowed her to earn the degree she needed to ultimately get the kind of job she desired. Jane explained, "I can't get a job if I don't graduate." For Jane, all actions undertaken in coursework and fieldwork worked toward the singular objective of getting a job.

Tools. In coursework contexts, Jane found conversations with peers served as useful tools for learning. "I learn from what people say in class," she explained, "It's not necessarily what they think about the readings or the material. It's what they do in their job. It's like how they have dealt with the student in particular situations." These conversations allowed Jane to think about situations that may arise in student affairs work that did not currently manifest in her own fieldwork context. These conversations also enabled her to think about her own work in new ways and consider multiple approaches for solving a particular problem.

Similar to Dexter, Jane "[didn't] see what [she was] learning in the classroom come out as much" in her career services work. Although she felt theory was important to student affairs work and believed student affairs practitioners used theory "without even knowing it…without knowing the specific name [of a theory]," she struggled to connect theories from coursework to

her fieldwork experiences. For example, the nature of her conversations with students—focused on resumes, cover letters, and graduate school personal statements—did not always allow her to explore dimensions of college student development. “The theory comes up, but I might not necessarily be able to name the theory,” she explained, “I see myself challenging and supporting my students. I can see that. That's simple.” However, she was able to make ample connections between environmental theories she learned about in her coursework and the career services office, which moved to a different part of campus at the beginning of her second year. Environmental theories helped her understand design choices used in the new office space and how staff members and students could interact with the space in new ways.

Echoing other participants, Jane found the tools of her fieldwork activity system most essential in preparing her for student affairs work. Opportunities to work with students provided concrete technical skills she foresaw using in future student affairs roles. “I can critique a resume now. I can critique a cover letter. I’m confident in doing that,” she noted, “Those are skills I can take into the next job I didn’t have before.” Opportunities to work alongside full-time staff members and assist on various aspects of their special projects similarly provided Jane with new technical skills around program planning and execution specifically in career services contexts. For example, she highlighted gaining experience in employer relations by spending time interacting with employers who attended the office’s various career fairs.

In addition to the more technical, administrative skills, fieldwork provided Jane with opportunities to develop more adaptive skills. Supervising the office’s undergraduate student ambassadors program allowed her to not only practice supervision skills but also develop a better sense of her professional boundaries. Noting these students were only a few years younger than her, Jane explained:

> Making sure that they understand that I can be friendly, but I'm not your friend. Learning how to build those boundaries now so there's no confusion because I've already had a student make a mistake and think I was their friend and call me fake for not checking on them. That's not my job. I'm not your friend.

Jane foresaw similar issues arising in her next position and saw the chance to practice setting professional boundaries as a graduate assistant crucial to her future success. Furthermore, exposure to various leadership and managerial styles through various supervisors helped clarify Jane's own needs and expectations in her work. She noted, "I've learned a lot about what I want in a culture of an office by working at the [career services office] right now." Jane viewed opportunities to develop these adaptive, interpersonal skills as beneficial to her professional development because they prepared her for, what she anticipated would be, the realities of her career in student affairs.

Community. Jane's coursework community included faculty members and cohort-mates, whom she interacted with during scheduled class times. She highlighted one member of her cohort with whom she built a strong friendship. She explained, "We met at [interview weekend], and I just didn't leave her alone. We kept in touch after this I-Days….I believe she's one of my best friends for life. She'll be in my wedding." Otherwise, Jane did not regularly socialize with members of her cohort. She also built a friendship with a doctoral student in a different discipline. These select friendships allowed Jane to build strong boundaries between her personal and professional lives. As she explained:

> I'm not one of those…student affairs is not life. I can't come home and talk about it. I can't talk about it while we're eating dinner. When we're in class, I will engage, and I will be present. When I'm at work, I'll use what I learned in the class and do that,

but I can't talk about student affairs all day, every day. I cannot.

Jane navigated her coursework activity system in such a way as to find moments of escape from the SAP program community in order to seek balance between her professional commitments and her personal life.

Jane's community within her fieldwork activity system included the director of career services, several assistant directors, several other first- and second-year graduate assistants, and undergraduate student workers. Similar to Dexter, who worked with her in the office as co-graduate assistant, Jane changed direct supervisors between her first and second year in the position. Although she maintained a collegial relationship with her new supervisor, she relied on her former supervisor as a mentor and source of wisdom on issues such as her impending job search. She maintained a similar policy on personal-professional boundaries that she used in coursework contexts. Although she frequently interacted with career services staff during her day-to-day operations, she was careful to leave professional relationships at the door at the end of the day.

Division of labor. Similar to other participants, Jane described faculty members in coursework contexts responsible for facilitating class sessions and helping students be engaged in the learning process. She noted each faculty member had their own unique teaching styles, but faculty members generally incorporated discussion-based activities into each of their courses:

> There might be a lecture. They might have a couple of slides, and then they'll break you into a group. There'll be different topics, and you might have a small group discussion about something, and then you report back to the big group. I think a lot of my class sessions are like that.

Whereas faculty members introduced key ideas and then created opportunities for reflective conversation, students took responsibility for engaging with one another and co-constructing knowledge. Indeed, Jane felt she learned just as much from her peers as from her faculty members:

> A lot of my learning in the [SAP] program has been done…or my teaching has been done not only by the professor, but a lot of it has depended on each other. A lot of the work that we do outside of class and the research and like, break down this theory so that we can understand, and then teaching it back to each other. A lot of my class sessions are like that. That's how we do a lot of our learning.

Jane's perspective reinforced other participants' perceptions of the division of labor in their coursework. Faculty members set the stage for students by selecting course materials and creating frequent opportunities for students to reflect upon, analyze, and apply these materials. Students, however, held significant responsibility for developing a baseline understanding of course material (e.g., by completing assigned readings) and participating in faculty-designed class sessions in order to deepen and complicate that understanding.

Whereas Dexter experienced a significant shift in his responsibilities within the office, Jane's division of labor remained more consistent between her first and second years. Reorganization in lines of supervision during her second year, however, also affected expectations around how Jane spent her time in the career services office. Her superiors laid out a detailed agenda for how Jane spent her 20 hours of work per week, including five hours on student appointments, five hours on internship programming, three and a half hours on supervising undergraduate student ambassadors, three hours on maintaining the office's online employment portal, two and a half hours on event support, and one hour on event planning. As

she moved closer to her job search, Jane found ways to add on responsibilities that mirrored requirements she saw in career services job descriptions. For example, she shadowed a career exploration course after noticing many job descriptions expecting practitioners to teach that kind of course. “So I tried to change my assistantship more to think about the job descriptions for the jobs that I want and what they require in doing that,” Jane explained, “I think that's been more of my focus just to make my skills more transferable and make me a better candidate.”

Rules. Similar to other participants, Jane described faculty members as the source of formal rules governing the coursework activity system. Faculty members articulated official program values (i.e., rules for what knowledge is essential) and enacted those values through curricular design (e.g., requiring certain courses and fieldwork experiences) and classroom facilitation. For example, she perceived faculty members placing emphasis on social justice by requiring students to take a course specifically on issues of diversity in student affairs and higher education work and embedding discussions on other diversity topics, such as social identities, into other courses. She also saw emphasis on connecting theory to practice embedded in the program’s internship requirements and frequent classroom conversations about how students saw academic material manifesting in their fieldwork experiences. Faculty members also implicitly communicated rules for how students should interact with them. Like other participants, Jane acknowledged faculty members were always approachable and accessible, but the burden of seeking them out for advice and assistance rested solely with the student.

In contrast to other participants, Jane significantly downplayed the role of peers in shaping the informal rules for participating in coursework contexts. Other participants highlighted tension between cohort-mates and how this tension made students hesitant to engage with one another in and out of the classroom. Jane, however, felt “everyone [was] generally

friendly" and individual students' willingness to speak up or stay quiet during class sessions was an extension of their personality and habits rather than a commentary on interpersonal dynamics. She resisted notions that cohort-mates needed to be exceptionally close or "best friends" with each other, which she felt was pushed upon prospective students during her interview weekend, but nevertheless noted, "Everyone interacts pretty well." Students, in Jane's view, maintained informal rules of collegiality instead of hostility when interacting with each other in classroom spaces.

In her fieldwork, superiors reinforced rules around graduate assistants' position within the office hierarchy. Like Dexter, who also worked in the office, Jane highlighted her supervisors were vigilant in ensuring she only worked 20 hours per week. Whereas Dexter found this a positive aspect of his fieldwork experience, however, Jane had a more negative interpretation. She explained, "In general, I just want to be treated like a paraprofessional….I'm there to learn." Jane felt her supervisors made decisions, which were intended to support her but in actuality hindered her professional development. She explained:

> For example, limiting me to only two and a half hours of event support a week. There is so much more that goes into an event than two and a half hours of you showing up and helping with registration. There's everything that has to be done before, and there's still a lot that has to be done after.

Even when she wanted to put in additional work in order to get additional experience and a more holistic understanding of career services work, formal office rules prevented her from doing so. She saw graduate assistants in other offices being treated as full-fledged professionals but in her own office felt she was treated as "just a GA [graduate assistant]."

Jane also differed from Dexter in the ways in which she perceived office politics and divisions between the office staff's espoused and enacted rules. Dexter believed staff members provided consistent messages about how the office operated and the rules by which he was expected to play. Jane noted greater degrees of inconsistency and felt staff members were not as accessible and open as they claimed to be. "People [say] that they want feedback, and that structural criticism, but they don't because then they get upset when they hear it," she stated. Although staff members claimed to value graduate assistants' insights and wanted them to participate in larger office conversations, Jane saw practices in direct conflict with this message. For example, she highlighted how graduate assistants were not specifically invited to staff meetings—"because of something that happened with a GA before we were there"—and, if graduate assistants elected to attend a staff meeting, this expressly did not count toward their 20 hour work week. She felt practices such as this prevented graduate assistants from having a full seat at the table and created a growing divide between them and full-time staff members.

Broader sociocultural trends. Several sociocultural trends, increasingly larger in their scope, shaped Jane's graduate training experiences. At an organizational level, the career services office experienced heavy staff turnover during Jane's tenure. Between her first and second year, several assistant directors transitioned out of and into the office. Over the course of her second year, the office hired three new staff members simultaneously. As Jane noted, these staffing alterations "changed the culture of the office, and in a way, created the vibe between people that have been there versus the newer people." However, although she sensed a definite shift in the office culture, she remained cognizant her own time in the office had a definite endpoint. This recognition shaped the ways in which she did, or did not, interact with new

professionals in the office and the extent to which she cared about the office politics she perceived.

As a woman of Color, Jane experienced a challenging transition to a new institutional context she perceived as much more culturally and racially homogeneous than her undergraduate institution. “[Brady] is also not diverse,” she explained, “Being at [my undergraduate institution], although it's predominantly White institution, I was able to still have those spaces where there's people of color and especially Black people.” Jane’s role as a university employee restricted her ability to build community with other Black students on campus. “Think about how many Black people are [at Brady] in general and then just think about those in grad school because I'm not trying to hang out with my students,” she stated, “It's a little weird because I'm like, ‘Oh, I must be a professional. I work in [career services].’” Navigating personal and professional boundaries, Jane felt restricted in her ability to build friendships with the small population of Black students who existed at Brady.

Beyond the challenges caused by lack of structural diversity, she also acknowledged instances in which overtly racist events occurred on campus: “I don't know if you've heard. Sometimes there's White supremacist signs on campus.” These incidents shaped Jane’s impression of the campus community and her place within it. “For all of my life, I've been socialized and desensitized to things like that,” she explained, “But sometimes when it's so raw and fresh and it's on campus, it's a little…I'm annoyed. I'm not so much scared.” Jane coped with her frustrations with the campus environment by spending increasing amounts of time in nearby cities. She shrugged, “I can go there and not worry about seeing students.”

Transitions to a new geographic context and part of the country also shaped Jane’s graduate training experiences. Attending the SAP program required Jane to move far away from

the friends and family who comprised her support system prior to graduate school. “My mom thinks that you can just jump on a plane, but it's actually not that easy, and it costs money,” she wryly responded. On top of that, harsh winters—so different than those she experienced growing up in the southeast—dampened her spirits:

> I don't like the cold. Learning that the salt that they're talking about is not the kosher salt that I season with. It's rock salt that you have to buy. So buying coats. I have boots for days now. The transition of that alone has been hard just because I don't do well being cold. I swear I'm anemic. They say I'm not. I believe that seasonal depression is real. Not being able to go outside. Not having a tan. It's hard.

Whereas other participants struggled with their relationship to the institution and the larger community, Jane developed a clear and singular perspective. She simply did not like it. However, she also acknowledged her discomfort was temporary and her presence at Brady served a larger purpose. Jane wanted to secure a job and believed completing the SAP program, regardless of the sociocultural challenges it wrought, would get her there.

The Tools of Student Affairs Graduate Preparation

Tools serve as an essential element within the mediated actions of an activity system. Within a CHAT framework, tools represent the material and cultural artifacts individuals access, use, and adapt as they pursue specific goals. The above participant narratives explore how individual students used the tools available to them in their unique coursework and fieldwork contexts. In this section, I examine common themes regarding sociocultural tools that emerged across participants’ experiences. I address tools employed in coursework, tools employed in fieldwork, and tools that crossed activity system boundaries.

Coursework Tools

Participants identified the coursework activity as a limited, though not entirely negligible, site for their professional learning. Participants found the tools available to them in their courses often lacking perceived relevance to their daily work. However, participants still highlighted several unique tools within their coursework activity system. They spoke about the content knowledge acquired through various courses and also highlighted opportunities for personal reflection and peer-to-peer discussion as helpful tools in their professional learning.

A consolidated notion of theory. In discussing the tools for learning student affairs work in their coursework systems, participants did not highlight specific materials (e.g., textbooks, journal articles) or concepts (e.g., individual theories) but instead consolidated these resources into generalized notions of scholarly insights they often referred to as "theory." Theory captured not only formal theories they learned about through their coursework (e.g., student development theories, organizational theories) but rather all of the scholarly concepts built into academic spaces (e.g., content knowledge about the history of higher education, particular functional areas, and legal principles). Ann described a typical class session as "the professor will talk and teach you about the history, or theory, or things like that" and then facilitate discussion. Dexter knew he should be using theory to guide his work but "struggled with applying theory to practice just because [he] didn't have consistent relationships with students." Theory, thus, served as a shorthand concept students used to describe and conceptualize the broad bodies of knowledge they saw centered in their coursework and related to professional practice.

When students did break down their consolidated notion of theory, they still spoke about broad categories of concepts. For example, both Dexter and Jane highlighted their affinity for "environmental theories." Dexter explained:

> The reason I think I liked that [course on higher education environments] the most is because it's applicable everywhere. Like sitting in this room right now. The size of the room, the colors of the room, where the desk is sitting, why we have certain chairs, why there is glass around. There's messages everywhere being communicated…that people don't recognize.

Similarly, Jane noted:

> I do see how what I've learned in [my environments course] about the conceptual environment and how the physical environment can influence things. We have a space in the career center, and I see how the windows can make people feel a little happier while they're doing their work…or how the little conversations room…so when my students want to tell me personal things, I can give them that space to be comfortable and have those conversations.

Jake discussed using "organizational theory" to understand residence life hierarchy and bureaucracy:

> This is the first time that I've actually been able to study leadership at least in a formal setting, so it's been helpful for me to understand the stakeholders [and] the politics that go into decisions and just things on college campuses. Seeing how an organizational change theory can be mixed with leadership theory has been helpful.

In each of these examples, participants did not reference specific theories, scholars, or written materials. Instead, participants highlighted the broad scope and purpose of theory families and how they applied to dimensions of participants' professional practice. The granular nuances and specificities of academic content mattered much less to students than the general impressions and insights that emerged from their coursework.

CHAT theorists highlight individuals engage with tools by accessing, using, and adapting them to pursue particular goals (Engeström, 2001). Faculty members served as gatekeepers to tools within the coursework activity system through their position as curriculum designers. In selecting particular texts used in courses and concepts to highlight, they decided the academic content to which students had *access*. Participants, however, engaged in a process of tool *adaptation* by consolidating this array of content knowledge into less complex yet more manageable personal understandings that could guide their work. For example, Ann, echoing but not specifically naming elements of moral development theories (e.g., Gilligan, 1982), knew showing students she cared was essential in adjudicating conduct meetings that would help students understand and learn from the consequences of their actions. When asked how she applied coursework to her conduct case load, she replied:

> If you are practicing like, I don't know, as a just and ethical person, I think it just makes sense that this is how you would practice student affairs and how you'd understand it. The research we're reading. It's like, well, yeah. That's how you treat students. You make them feel like they matter, that's just how you treat people.

Jane admitted she "[couldn't] name any specific [student development] theories off the top of [her] head" but understood supervising her office's undergraduate student ambassadors required a balance of challenge and support. "I see myself challenging and supporting my students," she explained, "I can see that. That's simple." Consolidation of content knowledge served as an essential adaptive process students undertook in order to make the conceptual tools of their coursework activity systems more personally meaningful and useful. Evidence of participants *using* a consolidated notion of theory appears later in this section in highlighting tools that crossed activity systems.

Personal reflection. Participants also described a variety of pedagogical tools and assignments, which supported modes of personal reflection. These tools included reflection papers students completed for multiple courses (including their student development theory and diversity courses and their group advising seminars), online discussion forum, and in-class activities. As a self-identified external processor, Dexter found opportunities for reflection a useful tool in refining ideas. “I can say my thoughts and really make…we use the phrase uncooked thoughts,” he explained, “And so I think that helps where I can make those uncooked thoughts cooked thoughts and share amongst my peers and larger setting.” He also noted reflection opportunities helped him understand “how I have gained this knowledge and why I think the way I think now.” Similarly, Ann highlighted how faculty members regularly built moments of reflection, either independently or in groups, into their courses. In describing a typical SAP program course, she explained:

> There's usually self-reflection or working with a peer, and things like that. Then there's class projects for you to engage in and understand the material. I would say in [the higher education law course] it’s not so much active learning in the sense that we're getting in groups. But it's all discussion-based. Classes are generally all discussion-based.

Reflection, therefore, served as a commonly used instructional tool for helping students make meaning of out-of-classroom experiences and deepen their understanding of academic material.

Embedded in these various modes of reflection was the cognitive task of application. Faculty members required students to make explicit connections between course content and their unique realities and professional contexts. For example, Ann explained how weekly sessions of their student development theory course followed a pattern of discussing a particular family of theories and then applying those theories to the undergraduate students with whom

they worked. However, she pushed back on this strategy at times in noting how some theories families did not fit certain student populations and how this application process sometimes felt prescriptive by forcing students into categories:

> The way it [the student development theory course] was taught was difficult because it was taught in this way where we were always expected to apply theories to our students. And we didn't always discuss the nuances of why it could be an issue, if you were always using theories to prescribe to your students and not treating them as individuals.

As part of their group advising seminar, participants completed a series of journals with faculty-designed scripted prompts. Again, these prompts emphasized using academic concepts to reflect upon experiences in coursework and fieldwork contexts. For example, one prompt used the ACPA and NASPA competencies (2015) as a framework for self-assessing how fieldwork experiences contributed to students' professional development. Another prompt used a challenge/support framework (Sanford, 1967) to help students identify the resources they needed to be successful in both coursework and fieldwork.

In creating opportunities for students to *access* moments of personal reflection, faculty members enabled them to *adapt* generalized prompts to their unique experiences and concerns. Students could reflect on, for example, how student development theories applied to the particular students with whom they routinely interacted (e.g., resident assistants, office assistants). Additionally, students *used* personal reflection to refine their ideas during various modes of academic discussion and to make meaning about experiences across their graduate training. Participants saw themselves, the people they worked with, and their organizations in new ways after engaging in various reflection processes.

Peer-to-peer discussion. Participants identified peer-to-peer discussion as a frequently used pedagogical tool in coursework spaces and one that enabled them to broaden their perspectives and imagine new professional possibilities. Jane highlighted the benefits of "just getting to listen to people" coursework spaces. These conversations—listening to "what they do in their job…[and] how they have dealt with the student in particular situations"—helped Jane to consider how she might handle similar issues in her own professional practice. Dexter focused on peer-to-peer discussion as a means for challenging his worldview on higher education and student affairs. As someone who held a host of privileged social identities, he identified conversations in his diversity course, for example, as a powerful space for challenging preconceived notions:

> I liked [small group discussions] because [they] gave me confidence to talk about my thoughts in a smaller group. Then when we came together as a big group, I felt more confident in saying what my thoughts were….I cannot live another person's life, but I can always hear and be mindful and observe and make myself more of an ally just because I hear their experiences and want to work with different groups of students on what issues or situations that they are put into.

Even though he acknowledged significant interpersonal tensions in that course, he stressed how content in that course was largely new for him. As a result of these dialogues, Dexter possessed "better words" for having conversations about social identities and a larger perspective on how social identities shaped students' experiences in college.

Students *accessed* peer-to-peer discussions as part of the expectations and opportunities set forth by program faculty members. They *used* these discussions to deepen their personal and professional understanding of a variety of issues (e.g., navigating ethical issues on the job,

working with diverse student populations, recognizing cultural biases). These moments often required them to *adapt* the discussion process to their particular needs. Some students chose to simply listen to their peers and connect those insights to their own contexts; others chose to work through complex ideas by speaking and sharing.

Fieldwork Tools

In contrast to their coursework activity system, participants readily identified the fieldwork activity system as the site in which they were learning the most about doing student affairs work. Fieldwork provided access to tools participants perceived as highly relevant to their professional objectives. All of the participants highlighted specialized material tools and assistantship responsibilities within their fieldwork as important vehicles for preparing for post-graduation employment.

Specialized material tools. Tools embody both intangible (e.g., symbols, concepts, ideas) and tangible (e.g., material technologies) artifacts individuals may access, use, and adapt within an activity system (Engeström, 2001). Whereas participants did not identify specific material tools when discussing their participation in the coursework activity system, each participant identified specialized material tools specific to their fieldwork site. As noted in his individual narrative, Jake relied heavily on his residence life handbook, a physical document that provided guidance on every aspect of the job responsibilities of his position, including student conduct, facilities management, and residential programming. “There’s a lot of structure with [the handbook] and exactly what to do,” he explained. In adjudicating conduct cases, Ann utilized both the institution’s student code of conduct and case management software to guide her decision-making and maintain administrative records respectively. Both Dexter and Jane used an online employer/employee portal as part of their daily responsibilities in the career

services office. “It's kind of like a middle ground, where employers can post jobs and students can apply for job on campus and off campus,” Dexter explained.

Participants *accessed* and *used* these material tools in order to execute their assigned job responsibilities. These technologies were simply part and parcel of doing their work. Whereas participants engaged in various processes of tool *adaptation* with the tools of their coursework activity system and the other tools of their fieldwork activity system—as I detail next—they did not engage in *adaptation* of these particular tools. The rules of participants’ fieldwork activity systems (i.e., formal office policies) affected their ability to engage in any form of adaptation. Ann had no authority to alter the student code of conduct, and her office required her to document cases using a particular software platform. Similarly, Dexter and Jane interacted with the online employer/employee portal as part of their assigned graduate assistant duties. Even Jake, who may have had more leeway in when and how he interacted with the residence life handbook, noted a departmental culture that emphasized little deviance from the manual’s stated policies. “When in doubt, go to the manual,” he quipped.

Assistantship responsibilities as practice. When asked to identify the most effective tools for learning to do student affairs work, participants unanimously identified targeted experiences in their fieldwork that allowed them to practice skills they foresaw using in their full-time professional careers or, as Dexter put it, “just doing the job.” Jake developed residential programming within a curricular model very different from his undergraduate institution. “I adapted well to [the new model],” he reflected, “I recognize that any time I switch universities, this type of transition will occur and understanding what I need to be successful in the new environment is something I am working towards understanding. Ann gained experience adjudicating residential- and university-level conduct cases for the first time:

> [The graduate assistantship] is invaluable in terms of learning about student conduct as a functional area. If I were to just read about student conduct there's no way that I could get a job in student conduct, but being in this experience and in an internship that's so well designed in terms of understanding res[idence] life, and a university level, and those different tiers and responsibility that comes with the tiers. It's completely invaluable. I feel very confident in the student conduct job search.

Dexter sought out additional internship experiences, such as tutoring and academic coaching, with student athletes:

> My biggest goal is to get as much experience as possible in student-athlete services because at the end of the day I feel as if you need to have that experience when you're looking for the jobs. I'm looking at jobs, and that's what they're looking for. What can you do to help this office? So having two years of experience with student-athlete services is what I think is what will help me make me best suitable for that job by the time I graduate or when I'm doing the job search.

Jane developed new skills in critiquing cover letters and resumes for students. “I would say my internship has been extremely meaningful seeing that it's convinced me to go into career services,” she reflected, “I can critique a resume, a cover letter now. I’m confident in doing that.” In each of these instances, students saw clear connections between the immediate work they did in their graduate assistantships and the work they foresaw themselves doing in the future. They gravitated toward practical experiences reflective of what they perceived full-time work would entail based on messages they received through observation of colleagues, conversations with supervisors, and qualifications listed in prospective job descriptions.

These specific assistantship job responsibilities are tools in that they reflect essentialized, socioculturally shaped meanings about what student affairs work entails. Students placed such value on them because they embodied messages students received through multiple channels about the nature of student affairs work and the specific practices involved in various functional areas. As highlighted in their individual narratives, participants focused on securing post-graduation employment in their preferred functional area as the core objective of their graduate training. Participants perceived *using* targeted assistantship responsibilities as a vital part of working toward securing that next position. In order to get a student conduct job, Anne needed the practical experience of adjudicating conduct cases. In order to get a career services job, Jane needed experience planning job fairs and interacting with potential employers. Several participants, furthermore, demonstrated *adapting* their assistantship responsibilities in order to be better situated to reach their dream job objective. For example, Jane sought out additional opportunities in her office that reflected the preferred qualifications she saw in career services job announcements. Dexter volunteered himself as "unofficial liaison" between career services and student athletes so he could leverage skills he developed through his internship toward working with his desired student population. Participants put such stock in their assistantship experiences because they symbolized, more so than any other tool, a trial run of what students perceived they would need to be able to demonstrate and accomplish in order to reach their professional goals.

The above examples focus heavily on students engaging in and practicing practical, administrative skills. Participants perceived fieldwork as a space to practice student affairs work and yet rarely discussed using theory or academic material in their day-to-day work. Influential professional bodies have long supported using theory- and research-based principles to guide

student affairs practice. The *Professional Competency Areas for Student Affairs Educators* (ACPA & NASPA, 2015) includes numerous references to theory and research as the foundation for diverse practices such as designing curricula, advising students, guiding professional development, and managing human resources. Popular textbooks used in graduate training programs, such as *Student Services: A Handbook for the Profession* (Schuh, Jones, & Torres, 2017) and *Student Development in College: Theory, Research, and Practice* (Patton, Renn, Guido, & Quaye, 2016), include sections on using theory to inform practice. These professional bodies, however, are not the only sources of sociocultural meanings students perceive in defining the scope and nature of student affairs work. Jane and Dexter, for example, discussed how they had reviewed job descriptions for the types of post-graduation positions they wanted to secure. Although these job descriptions may have mentioned knowledge of and ability to use theory, both participants perceived emphasis on ability to demonstrate particular administrative skills. Similarly, Ann felt her supervisors were "shaping [her] into a competitive professional" because they provided structured exposure to key administrative processes (e.g., using case management software, adjudicating multiple types of cases) involved in student conduct. Multiple sociocultural forces, therefore, shaped students' understanding of student affairs work and consequently the value they placed on practicing administrative skills in their fieldwork.

Tools Crossing Systems

Participants largely described their coursework and fieldwork activity systems as discrete entities—two worlds that very rarely collided with each other. Jake noted how, despite faculty members' intentions, the program experience "[didn't] feel as integrated" because fieldwork supervisors did not leverage opportunities to talk about academic material outside of the classroom. Dexter perceived program faculty members and career services professionals working

toward “different goals and…and trying to reach different expectations.” Whereas SAP program faculty members focused on providing broad-based training and holistic attention to their students’ professional development, staff members in his office focused on meeting metrics and contributing to institutional retention goals. Although faculty members created opportunities for students to reflect on their fieldwork experiences in coursework spaces, fieldwork supervisors often did not afford students similar opportunities to reflect on academic material in fieldwork spaces. As such, students had little practice in using and rarely translated the tools available in their coursework activity system to their fieldwork activity system.

Theoretical concepts manifesting within the sociocultural realities of students’ fieldwork sites served as the rare exception to this observation. In general, participants struggled to see or value theory in their professional practice. Jane and Dexter felt their specific job responsibilities did not make them privy to developmental relationships with students. Ann saw theory as reiteration of what she already understood as best practices for working with students. Jake perceived generally low relevance between what he read for many of his classes and what he saw on a day-to-day basis in his work. Despite their general sentiments about connections between coursework and fieldwork, however, participants identified at least one focus area of their coursework that did translate to and shape their understanding of a particular area of their fieldwork. Jane and Dexter cited environmental theories as helpful in understanding the career service office’s new physical plant on campus. Jake and Ann used concepts from their higher education law course to make sense of legal and policy issues that arose in residence life (e.g., freedom of speech in residence halls) and student conduct (e.g., evidentiary burdens) respectively. Ann also used concepts from her college teaching course in designing and facilitating an undergraduate leadership course. In each of these narratives, select theoretical

concepts from the coursework activity system shaped dimensions of professional practice within the fieldwork activity system.

These examples are essentially instances of theory-in-practice, which is an espoused value of both the SAP program and the student affairs profession at large. As articulated in both professional and programmatic documents, graduate students are supposed to leverage ideas from the coursework in their daily practice. Importantly, each of these examples include the coursework material students identified in their individual narratives as being the most beneficial and meaningful expressly because they could use this material in their practice. In their coursework, participants received messages about the desirability of using theory in practice. Additionally, participants often relied on the sociocultural forces embedded in their fieldwork (e.g., contact with supervisors, observations of what colleagues are doing and prioritizing) to derive meaning about the nature of student affairs work. Tools that could translate from the coursework system to the fieldwork system were especially salient because they carried two layers of socioculturally shaped meanings. On one level, these tools reflected the desirability of connecting theory and practice. “I know we are supposed to be using theory [in practice],” Jane reflected, for example. Participants found theoretical concepts easily and obviously connected to their fieldwork desirable because they could enact and participate in an oft-communicated professional value. On a second level, these tools proved useful in meeting the day-to-day demands of participants’ responsibilities. Given their attraction to “doing the job” and engaging in hands-on experiences, students gravitated to tools that could help them participate in their vision of what doing student affairs work entailed. Participants internalized both layers of meaning and thus gravitated toward those coursework tools they could *use* and *adapt* to their fieldwork responsibilities.

The Contradictions of Student Affairs Graduate Preparation

Within a CHAT framework, contradictions—or the tensions, dilemmas, and disruptions that emerge during activity—serve as indicators of transformation and learning within an activity system (Engeström, 2001). As such, the multiple levels of contradictions that may emerge within the course of students' graduate training provide additional insight into how they are learning to do student affairs work. In this section, I describe findings from across participant narratives highlighting tensions that occurred at each level of contradiction (primary, secondary, tertiary, and quartenary).

Primary Level Contradictions

Primary contradictions occur within one component of an activity system. Participants in this study highlighted contradictions between the formal and informal *rules* of their fieldwork activity systems. Ann highlighted the "shady politics" that emerged during divisional reorganization and, as she perceived, continued to inform professional advancement at the institution. She noted how divisional leaders espoused messages around transparency and rewarding professionals based on the quality of their work. In practice, however, she observed much more political dealings and professionals who gave different messages to different groups of people in order to win favor. As noted in her narrative, Jane similarly observed mismatched communication about the role of graduate assistants and their voice in the career services office. Her superiors publicly espoused they wanted graduate assistants to share feedback up the chain of command but simultaneously took steps to remove graduate assistants from formal communication spaces (e.g., department staff meetings).

These tensions between the formal and informal rules of fieldwork contexts transformed how both Anne and Jane viewed the student affairs profession and their role within it. For Anne,

witnessing these political machinations made it "hard for [her] to want to stay in the field" because they violated her core value of authenticity and ran counter to what she understood as the field's professional values. "I'm told to practice one thing, and then in actuality, in order to succeed, I need to be doing other things," she explained. Tensions between the formal and informal rules of the career services office did not force Jane to question her place in the field, but they did help her discern professional priorities moving forward. She explained how encountering challenging moments and leadership styles she did not respect in her work for the office helped her understand the kind of office culture she would be seeking in her post-graduation position. Internal dissonance created by these primary tensions ultimately led to participants clarifying their values and developing a less idealized understanding of how student affairs units operated.

Secondary Level Contradictions

Secondary contradictions exist between components of an activity system. Several participants identified tensions between the *community* and the *division of labor* of their coursework activity systems. Jake, Ann, and Dexter each spoke, in various ways, about difficult cohort dynamics affecting how students participated in classroom sessions. They spoke to both students "attacking" one another when conversations turned to contentious topics (e.g., social justice and social identities) and students retreating from discussions for fear of being attacked or perceived as problematic. As noted in participants individual narratives, cohort-mates served as central figures of the coursework activity system *community*. Classroom participation—the ways in which students did or did not show up in classroom conversations—represents a form of *division of labor* in that students' chief responsibility during sessions was to engage in various faculty-designed discussions.

Related to the issue of cohort dynamics affecting classroom operations, participants spoke to another secondary contradiction between the *community* and *subjects*. Jake and Dexter talked about the effects of difficult cohort dynamics in a more general sense. They discussed how "people" reacted to moments of hostility and tension but did not directly locate those feelings within themselves. Ann, however, specifically discussed how cohort dynamics in the classroom had personally affected her. Most notably, she felt conversations about race in the classroom focused on Black and White identities and perceived other students of Color as not validating or making room for her biracial identity and unique perspectives. Over time, she resigned herself to simply not participating in these discussions.

These secondary contradictions—existing at the intersections of how students perceived themselves, perceived others, and behaved in accordance with those perceptions—shaped participants' overall attitudes toward their coursework. When students felt interpersonal tension in the classroom, they connected those feelings to courses being unproductive and burdensome. For example, Ann highlighted the additional challenges raised in classroom spaces:

> Academic wise, I think it's mostly cohort dynamics. It's not really the academics. Grad school is challenging, I think, but it's still manageable. But when you are in an environment where you're constantly questioning what everyone is thinking about you, that's when you go to class, and you're like, "I just don't want to be here today. I do not want to engage in these conversations."

In discussing the diversity course, Jake observed:

> It was facilitated poorly. Or…I know you can't attribute it to the facilitator. It was the participants as well. I think our cohort is doing a lot of developing, and when we had conversations with one another last year, it was very difficult to have conversations

without feeling attacked. I think our level of maturity and develop was not where it could have been.

Difficult interpersonal dynamics shaped the extent to which participants were willing to engage in classroom processes designed to deepen their learning. As a result, when asked to reflect on classroom experiences, participants remembered conflict rather than the intended content knowledge.

Tertiary Level Contradictions

Tertiary contradictions occur when the objects or tools for pursuing the objects of one activity system are introduced to another activity system. As discussed earlier, participants conceptualized academic content from their coursework into a consolidated notion of theory. Although each participant, found very particular ways in which to use theory in their practice, they generally bemoaned the lack of connection between what they learned about in class and what they were required to do on the job. Participants experienced contradiction between the *tools* of the coursework activity system (i.e., theory) and the *objects* of the fieldwork activity system (i.e., completing required job responsibilities).

In keeping with stated professional values and competencies, faculty members intended academic content to help students become stronger, more aware practitioners. The theoretical, research-based principles around which courses centered should have served as tools participants could use, through formal and informal means, to make sense of complex phenomena and design cocurricular environments for supporting undergraduate student learning and success. However, participants often could not see how academic content helped them accomplish the practical realities of their day-to-day jobs. Dexter and Jane felt student development theory did not apply well to their work because their student interactions in the career services office frequently

involved one-time, transactional interactions (e.g., reviewing a student's resume, providing information about a career fair). Ann believed theory simply reiterated what she already intuited was good practice for working with students—providing challenge and support, making students feel they mattered, and helping them reflect on their experiences. Participants saw theory as ancillary to rather than an essential part of doing student affairs work. For example, Dexter argued future employers would not care about the theories he knew; instead, they would want to know what practical experiences he possessed. He may have received such messages through several channels. For example, Dexter discussed reading through prospective job descriptions and highlighted the focus on practical experiences captured in those descriptions. As a graduate assistant in the career services, he worked alongside colleagues who possessed student affairs training but also those with backgrounds in other fields. As such, colleagues may have been unprepared to help Dexter think through ways in which he could apply theory to practice. When faced with challenging moments in their fieldwork, participants looked for experiential wisdom from practitioners whom they trusted rather than theoretical insights from their coursework.

Outside of the specific instances discussed earlier, participants found little utility in their coursework as a means for learning how to do student affairs work. Participants did not offer wholesale condemnation of the theoretical and conceptual knowledge embedded within the coursework activity system. Indeed, each participant found some aspect of their coursework that proved useful for better understanding and facilitating their fieldwork. However, they shared an overarching sentiment that theoretical and conceptual knowledge was an often ineffective tool in pursuit of their goals. Knowledge of theory, as they perceived, did not make them markedly better at their work and would not help them secure a full-time position after graduation.

Quartenary Level Contradictions

Quartenary contradictions occur between the components of neighboring activity systems. Generally, participants described their coursework and fieldwork activity systems as two different worlds. As noted earlier, Jake saw a lack of "integration" between coursework and fieldwork, and Dexter saw SAP program faculty members and career services colleagues working toward "different goals." As such, they perceived little tension between their lives as students and their lives as professionals other than seeing coursework as not terribly useful toward pursuing their professional goals. Jane noted her work schedule, kept strictly to 20 hours per work, allowed her to complete coursework assignments without feeling overburdened. "Because I am set on that 20 hours, I really don't have as much problems balancing my grad work from my school work," she explained. Ann similarly noted she did not feel pulled between meeting her fieldwork responsibilities or meeting her coursework responsibilities. She noted, "I don't feel any tension [between coursework and fieldwork], and I think this is because [my supervisors] are both alums of the [SAP] program." Even Jake, who often worked longer hours due to the nature of his residence life position, felt capable of meeting the demands of both roles:

> This [academic] program has not been extremely challenging for me….I thoroughly feel that my education prior to this has really prepared me for this because when I go and write these papers, I'm getting As on them and do them with ease and whatnot.

Most participants felt capable of being successful in their coursework and being successful in their fieldwork. However, participants described success in these two environments in different terms. Success in the coursework system took the form of getting As on assignments and staying on top of the assigned reading load. Success in the fieldwork system took the form of accruing new experiences and receiving validation from supervisors. Participants did not highlight a

vision of success that spoke to both environments, such as finding ways to better integrate theoretical knowledge into their professional practice.

Only Dexter—who admitted to focusing heavily on field experiences at the detriment of his classwork—described tension between the *rules* of his coursework and fieldwork contexts. In order to fit in the time to complete various job responsibilities, he sacrificed reading class materials and working on coursework assignments. However, Dexter also took on a significant number of fieldwork opportunities beyond his graduate assistantship including volunteering with student athletes and campus recreation activities. Thus, any tension he experienced in trying to fulfill all of his responsibilities across activity systems stemmed from his own personal choices rather than unreasonable expectations placed upon him.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I presented findings from my study of four students enrolled in the SAP program, a Master's-level student affairs preparation program at Brady University. I began with narratives focused on each student in order to highlight their unique experiences and illuminate the particular nuances of the learning environments that comprised their graduate training. I then identified shared experiences in how participants accessed, used, and adapted tools within and across their coursework and fieldwork activity systems. I concluded by identifying levels of contradictions that emerged throughout participants' graduate training and the implications these contradictions had for participants' professional practice.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study addressed the central question: *How do students in a Master's-level student affairs program learn to do student affairs work during their graduate preparation?* I sought to explore this central question by utilizing CHAT, a sociocultural learning perspective, in investigating (a) how students' professional learning is distributed across and mediated by multiple activity systems; (b) how students access, use, and adapt the tools embedded in their specific activity systems during their graduate training; and (c) how contradictions that emerge within the activity systems of graduate training transform students' professional practice. In this final chapter, I answer my research questions by describing key insights derived from the findings detailed in Chapter IV and offer implications for both research and practice.

Research Questions and Answers

Students enrolled in Master's-level student affairs programs learn to do student affairs work by engaging in activity within and across multiple learning environments as they pursue the singular, yet dynamic, goal of becoming proficient at, what they understand to be, student affairs work. Within a CHAT framework, professional learning involves transformation of the self andsocial environments through ongoing activity directed at individualized goals. Students perceive professional learning distributed across both coursework and fieldwork systems but highlight the fieldwork system as the space in which they experience the greatest transformation in themselves and their professional practice. Furthermore, the fieldwork system mediates the coursework system by shaping students' perceptions about what content knowledge is valuable to their professional practice. Students have access to a variety of tools in their coursework and fieldwork systems but ultimately seek to use and adapt those tools they see explicitly connected to their sense of what student affairs work entails. Contradictions, or perceived tensions,

emerging within and across the learning environments of graduate training create dissonant conditions students respond to as part of their professional learning. In the following subsections, I provide more detailed description of these insights and their relationship to existing literature.

Context Shapes Opportunities for Professional Learning

Sociocultural learning scholars (e.g., Hansman, 2001; Niewolny & Wilson, 2009; Vygotsky, 1978) assert learning is a condition of the environment in which it occurs. Context fundamentally shapes the content and nature of learning. Indeed, these student narratives highlight how unique constellations of environments shape how Master's students learn to do student affairs work. Discussion of the professional learning and development graduate training programs hope students will participate in, therefore, must consider the social and material realities of the environments students occupy. The realities of students' given contexts fundamentally shape the learning experiences students may encounter and the tools they see as available to them in addressing those experiences.

Each of the participants identified profound experiences in their fieldwork that felt salient to their professional learning and shaped their professional practice. Jake discussed the powerful learning that emerged from his experience responding to a student with suicidal ideation during his duty rotation and the effects that experience had on his sense of preparedness for the field. Ann discussed encountering organizational politics contrasting her own ethical guidelines and forcing her to re-evaluate her conceptions of the profession. Dexter focused on difficult conversations in his diversity course, which forced him to confront his privileged identities and gain wider perspective on the inequities that persist in higher education. Jane encountered contrasting messages about her voice and value within her fieldwork office and gained new insight into the organizational culture she desired after graduation. Each of these examples speak

to broad competencies deemed necessary for student affairs work—crisis management, personal ethics, multicultural competence, and cultural auditing respectively (ACPA & NASPA, 2015). Yet each of these examples also emerges from a specific set of conditions and interactions between students and their environments.

Without the particular set of circumstances at play in each example, students may have not developed the particular insights into the profession and their professional practice they deemed so important. Jake's involvement in that duty incident provided a turning point in how he understood his value and competence within a department that offered little validation for work done. Without that experience, his trajectory within the department and moving forward may have looked very different. Ann may have left the SAP program without her newfound sense of personal and professional ethics had she not encountered troubling office politics within her division. Had he enrolled in a program without a required diversity course, Dexter may have not encountered the difficult conversations forcing him to confront his privileged identities. Without being exposed to inconsistent messages from her supervisors, Jane may not have developed the understanding of organizational culture that ultimately informed her job search process.

Context matters because it shapes the conditions in which students develop specific and durable meaning about who they are, the profession they are entering, and the work involved in that profession. Fieldwork contexts served as powerful incubators for nurturing how participants conceptualized the student affairs profession and student affairs work. Students received messages by interacting with professional colleagues, who modeled the nature of student affairs work through their own practice. These colleagues more directly transmitted messages through the specific professional development opportunities they provided for students. Ann discussed

how her supervisors used a sequence of administrative experiences to make her a "competitive [student conduct] professional." Dexter's supervisors assigned him specific responsibilities as part of "grooming [him]…for the job search." Students received messages about student affairs work from other sources. Through their coursework, for example, they encountered the ACPA and NASPA (2015) competency areas and the importance of connecting theory and practice. Yet, what they saw and did in their day-to-day assistantships duties, they perceived, had more lasting effect on how they described the student affairs profession and the knowledge and skills necessary to do student affairs work.

This focus on context and its power to shape learning raises issues for a profession that has increasingly centered on standardization of professional competencies. Scholars (Lovell & Kosten, 2000; Newton & Richardson, 1976; Pope & Reynolds, 1997) have long attempted to define exactly what new student affairs practitioners need to know and do in order to be effective at their work. Literature assessing the preparedness and effectiveness of new practitioners (e.g., Cooper et al., 2016; Cuyjet et al., 2009; Dickerson et al., 2011; Herdlein, 2004) similarly relies upon standardized sets of knowledge and skills against which individuals are evaluated. Most recently, the largest student affairs professional associations, ACPA and NASPA (2010, 2015), codified these efforts in a set of professional competency areas designed for practitioners across functional areas. These competency areas are now being used to guide scholarship (e.g., Muller, Grabsch, & Moore, 2018; Ryder & Kimball, 2015), graduate courses (e.g., Kranzow & Jacob, 2018; Shaw, 2018), including those in the SAP program, and professional association meetings (e.g., ACPA, 2018). As such, the standardization of student affairs work continues as a powerful force for shaping the field.

Predicting what new practitioners should know and do without attention to the extent to which their learning environments allow them to actually develop those competencies, however, continues the pattern of new practitioners entering the field not fully prepared to do the work and perpetuates subpar standards for new practitioners. The unique contexts participants navigated allowed them to build certain skillsets and develop particular insights. By that same token, their learning environments may not have been conducive to their building alternate skillsets. Concerns about the preparedness of new practitioners might speak to students simply never being exposed to certain skills and issues because of the nature of their fieldwork site. For example, existing literature often raises concerns about new practitioners' administrative and budgeting skills (Cooper et al., 2016; Cuyjet et al., 2009; Dickerson et al., 2011). Even among the four participants in this study, however, students had vastly different experiences regarding administrative duties. Jake oversaw a host of administrative duties in managing his residence hall including facilities management and program budgeting. In contrast, Dexter and Jane had much less direct authority over administrative aspects of the career services office. These contrasting narratives highlight the need for continued professional development well into a new practitioner's full-time career so that they build skills unavailable to them during graduate training. Rather than bemoaning recent graduates' lack of preparation, mid- and senior-level practitioners may need to embrace a more continuous training model that recognizes the role of context in shaping professional demands and opportunities.

Unequal Distribution of Professional Learning Across Activity Systems

Findings suggest, although professional learning was distributed across both coursework and fieldwork activity systems, it was not distributed equally. Each of the participants described fieldwork experience as the primary location for their professional learning as they sought to

become more skilled practitioners and position themselves for full-time careers. Fieldwork provided challenging experiences (e.g., Jake responding to a student's suicidal ideation during his duty rotation) and opportunities to practice new skills (e.g., Ann facilitating conduct hearings or Jane and Dexter planning career fairs) that transformed how these students understood the nature of student affairs work and their own level of preparedness to do that work. Participants deemed opportunities to practice skills through assistantship responsibilities especially important because they perceived these opportunities would be relevant to their work and securing a position after leaving the SAP program.

These narratives about the centrality of fieldwork as a space for professional learning echo previous research on student affairs graduate preparation. For example, in Renn and Jessup-Anger's (2008) study, "nearly all participants wrote about how assistantships, practicum placements, and internships were essential components in their preparation for full-time positions" (p. 329). Similarly, Liddell et al.'s (2014) study found various fieldwork experiences had the greatest effect on new practitioners' sense of their work compared to their coursework experiences. Previous research on graduate training highlights concerns, often from seasoned professionals already in the field, about new practitioners lacking the administrative and interpersonal skills needed to do their work well (Cooper et al., 2016; Dickerson et al., 2011; Herdlein, 2004). This study demonstrates current graduate students themselves have similar concerns. Participants wanted to spend their time and energies during graduate training on practicing the activities they envisioned doing in their post-graduation position. Academic content and conceptual knowledge came second to being able to "do the job."

Students rarely mentioned coursework as a space in which they transformed their professional practice. Indeed, Ann went so far as to say courses had done "nothing" to change

her professional knowledge and skills. Participants could identify very niche areas of coursework they found interesting or relevant, but courses ultimately had little perceived effect on changing how participants understood the nature of student affairs work and how they practiced that work. This trend of students devaluing coursework experiences compared to fieldwork experiences again mirrors previous research on student affairs graduate preparation (Liddell et al., 2014; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008). Although scholars (Cuyjet et al., 2009) have positioned coursework as an important site for developing content knowledge, this study suggests the field has ways to go in helping graduate students see content knowledge as valuable as the skills and tools they develop in their fieldwork. Student affairs graduate preparation programs are built upon a dual training model (Perez, 2016a), in which coursework and fieldwork are supposed to play a role in shaping new practitioners' professional development. Yet, findings from this study illustrate the unequal distribution of professionally meaningful activity and professional learning across these two sites.

Fieldwork Activity System Mediates Coursework Activity System

Data from this study reveal the unequal distribution of professional learning across activity systems emerges from a fundamental relationship between the two systems. Ultimately, fieldwork experiences mediate what students perceive as useful, meaningful, and relevant in their coursework. When participants could not see academic concepts manifested in their daily practice and could not envision how to translate specific theories into practice, they discounted that knowledge as insignificant and irrelevant. Participants identified the academic content they could use in their current professional practice as the most salient and influential elements of their coursework. The realities and expectations of participants' fieldwork contexts, therefore,

served as a filter for evaluating the utility of conceptual tools available to them in their coursework contexts.

In discussing how coursework shaped their professional practice and the moments in which coursework felt especially salient to them, participants highlighted a sense of needed immediacy in translating theory to practice. Dexter and Jane struggled to engage with student development theory concepts because those concepts did not immediately and overtly speak to the kind of interactions they had with students during their day-to-day operations within the career services office. Conversely, each gravitated toward content from their campus environments course because they could automatically apply concepts from that course to understand why the office was moved to a more central part of campus and how the physical design of the space facilitated the office's unique goals. Ann, similarly, highlighted coursework material she could apply to her immediate practices. For example, she placed high value on her college teaching course because she could use principles and ideas from that course in facilitating her own undergraduate leadership course. Other course materials had less utility for Ann because she did not see how they helped her complete her job duties any better than she could have without them. Participants needed theory to be relevant to their current lived experiences and meaningful for tackling their existing job responsibilities.

As noted earlier, scholars of student affairs graduate preparation have repeatedly identified imbalances in the value graduate students place on their coursework and fieldwork (Liddell et al., 2014; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008). This study extends upon that notion by providing insight into why graduate students identify fieldwork as a more influential learning environment than their coursework. Graduate students crave to see immediate and obvious connections between what they learn in their courses and what they see in their day-to-day

professional lives. When those connections are not made, students deem content knowledge less relevant to their practice. Much of the extant literature on student affairs graduate preparation focuses solely on dimensions of coursework (e.g., Flowers, 2003; Young & Elfrink, 1991), and even scholarship that does attend to both systems (e.g., Dickerson et al., 2011; Liddell et al. 2014; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008) does not thoroughly examine relationships between coursework and fieldwork systems. In considering how fieldwork experiences mediate how students perceive coursework experiences, however, this study calls into question the utility of scholarship that considers single activity systems (i.e., only issues of coursework or only issues of fieldwork). Indeed, graduate student activity occurs across both systems. The particular sociocultural and material conditions existing in one system ultimately shape the nature of student activity in the other system. In order to achieve a more holistic and, ultimately, accurate understanding of how individuals prepare to do student affairs work during their graduate training, scholars must continue to explore interactions between the varied learning environments students traverse.

Participants in this study needed theory to inform and be relevant to their current practices. This need for immediate application and relevance is perhaps unsurprising given the literature on principles of adult learning and motivation. When adult learners connect academic content with their lived experiences, they are able to situate that knowledge within existing schemas, cognitive structures that enable organized thought, and thereby develop richer and more complicated understanding of academic content (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). The extent to which adult learners are able to see the relevance of content to their unique needs and circumstances increases the value learners place on the content (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000) and in turn is associated with positive achievement outcomes including goal attainment (Locke &

Latham, 2002) and greater interest (Schiefele, 2009). Indeed, situating learning in the learner's experience is a hallmark of best practices for supporting the learning and development of young adults (Ambrose, Bridges, Lovett, DiPietro, & Norma, 2010; Baxter Magolda, 2004).

Participants felt the specific responsibilities of their graduate assistantships best prepared them for full-time work after graduation by allowing them to practice requisite skills. However, these assistantships likely did not expose students to all of the dimensions of professional work expected of a full-time professional. Indeed, some participants such as Jane and Dexter described seeking out additional opportunities beyond the demands of their assistantships in order to flesh out their professional experiences and skill sets in preparation for the job search. Existing scholarship (Magolda & Carnaghi, 2004; Renn & Hodges, 2007) additionally highlights the challenges new practitioners face in moving from graduate assistantship work to full-time professional work. The acknowledgement individuals learn best when they can make connections between academic content and their lived experiences—as participants routinely articulated—complicates matters. Although academic content may have not been immediately applicable to participants' professional lives and needs, they may likely need such content at a future point in their careers. Thus, faculty members working in graduate preparation programs face the two-fold challenge of helping students not only see the relevance of theory to their current work but also internalize and value theory as a more long-term tool for addressing phenomena that may have yet to arise in students' professional practice.

Students Select Tools with Particular Embedded Meanings

Tools, both material and conceptual, are "cultural entities" (Engeström, 2001, p. 134) in that they embody broader sociocultural messages and convey meaning to individuals. In using particular tools individuals, in turn, replicate and reinforce meaning. For example, particular

theories introduced in courses serve as conceptual tools available in students' coursework activity system. Each theory carries meanings—about higher education institutions and the people who operate within them, about human learning and development, about the desired outcomes of postsecondary education—shaped by the social, historical, and cultural trends in which the theorist operated. The inclusion of a particular theory within a student affairs graduate preparation curriculum furthermore conveys meaning about its relevance for the field and its alignment to professional values and practices. The essential element in understanding how students access, use, and adapt tools during their graduate training, then, is identifying the embedded meanings students attach to certain tools.

In the previous chapter, I discussed how students accessed, used, and adapted tools within and across their coursework and fieldwork activity systems. Whereas the coursework system provided participants with minimal tools for pursuing their objectives and changing their professional practice, the fieldwork system provided ample tools to support participants' professional learning. Additionally, participants highlighted a single tool that translated across activity systems—academic content, or "theories," they could translate to their fieldwork responsibilities. Considering the myriad tools students had access to in both of their activity systems, the embedded meanings attached to a given tool ultimately informed the likelihood of participants choosing to use and adapt that tool in their ongoing activity.

Specifically, participants sought out tools whose embedded meanings connected to their existing, essentialized conceptions of student affairs work. When participants perceived a tool prepared them for the needs and responsibilities of post-graduation employment, they readily used and adapted that tool. When participants perceived a tool did not align with the demands of professional practice, they deemed that tool irrelevant. For example, participants routinely cited

the specific job responsibilities of their graduate assistantships, which allowed them to practice particular skills, as the most important tool for their professional learning. Students put such emphasis on these experiences because they embodied the notion this "is student affairs work." Similarly, students sought out academic content they could explicitly and immediately connect to their fieldwork. Participants knew they could and should be translating theory to practice (because connecting theory and practice "is student affairs work") and thus gravitated toward academic material that allowed them to do so. In refining their professional practice, students looked for external messages about what their work should entail and what would prepare them to secure a full-time job.

Participant narratives revealed how multiple and mutually influencing levels of sociocultural forces shaped the embedded messages participants attached to particular tools. In closest proximity to themselves, participants identified mentors within their fieldwork contexts, and occasionally coursework context, whom they turned to for professional advice. These actors had the ability to reinforce messages about the tools that would or would not be useful for participants in preparing for full-time work. For example, Ann relied on her supervisors for advice about which electives to take to complete her coursework, and Jane sought out advice from one of her supervisors about additional fieldwork experiences that would make her more competitive for career services positions. On broader levels, participants received embedded messages through course assignments (e.g., reflecting on the ACPA and NASPA competency areas, reporting on various functional areas) and engagement with various professional associations. In each of these instances, participants encountered messages about the nature of student affairs work, which they then used to make decisions about the extent to which a particular tool could be useful to them during their graduate training.

Contradictions Shape Professional Practice

Contradictions that emerge in and across activity systems are important to understanding professional learning because they signal transformation occurring. Each of the four levels of contradictions appeared in some form throughout this study. Participants experienced incongruence between the formal and informal rules of their professional work (contradiction within a single element of a system). Contentious cohort dynamics affected how students participated in and felt validated by classroom conversations (contradiction between elements of a system). Participants often struggled to see the value of theory and to apply coursework material to their professional practice (contradiction between the tools of one system and the objects of another system). Participants generally did not perceive tension between their coursework and fieldwork responsibilities, but Dexter admitted feeling challenged to adequately engage in both systems (contradiction between elements of adjacent systems).

Students experiencing dissonance remained at the heart of these various levels of contradictions. Students encountered moments in coursework and fieldwork contexts, which challenged their current perceptions and abilities. Dissonance created through contradictions required participants to change their conceptions of the student affairs profession. Ann developed new insight into how professional actions do not always align with professional values in student affairs work. She graduated from the SAP program with a more tempered appraisal of the profession and was thinking more critically about her long-term participation in the field. Jane encountered supervision and leadership styles that challenged her existing notions of what organizational cultures could look like and the kinds of issues she might encounter as a new practitioner. Dissonance created through contradictions also required participants to change their conceptions of themselves. Jake's experiences in difficult class conversation on diversity and

social justice enabled him to think more deeply about his privileged social identities and how they mediated his ability to understand these issues. In struggling to meet both coursework and fieldwork responsibilities, Dexter began to question his reliance on practical experience over conceptual and theoretical knowledge. Transformations in conceptions led participants to engage in new activity and professional practice. In response to particular transformations, for example, participants sought out counsel from trusted mentors, reevaluated their priorities, and altered plans for their upcoming job search.

Dissonance is a key element of many adult development theories. Experiencing and reconciling dissonance is associated with a number of positive developmental outcomes including more complex ways of knowing (Perry, 1981), more complex moral reasoning (Kohlberg, 1981; Walker, 1988), identity formation (Erikson, 1980; Josselson, 1996), and capacity for self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2001). Contradictions that emerge within and across activity systems, which foster moments of dissonance, are therefore important elements in shaping the professional learning process. These contradictions create developmental tasks students are able to confront and respond to as they think about and practice student affairs work in new ways. Although participants often described contradictions as troubling, concerning, and disheartening, they are essential to the professional learning that ultimately emerges from graduate training.

Implications for Scholarship and Research

This study explicitly centered learning, rather than socialization, as the phenomenon of interest in understand student affairs graduate preparation programs. More specifically, this study utilized cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT), a sociocultural learning theory gaining increasing attention in United States-based education literature, to understand both the learning

and the learning environments of student affairs graduate preparation. Findings from this study have implications for future research and scholarship, including refining elements of CHAT and directing future work on student affairs graduate preparation programs.

Supporting Sociocultural Approaches to Learning

Professional learning scholars (e.g., Fenwick & Nerland, 2014) have called for new ways of envisioning the learning process in response to new modes of knowledge production and distribution of work across organizational and geographic boundaries. This study supports such a call and challenges traditional learning models, which center individual cognition and overlook the social, cultural, and materials realities in which learning occurs. Participants in this study operated within such rich and dynamic contexts that shaped how they understood student affairs work and their own professional practice. By attending to the sociocultural dimensions of the learning process, I was able to situate students' professional learning within a broader understanding of the cultural and organizational dynamics, interpersonal relationships, and sociomaterial tools, which ultimately facilitated that learning. Individual student learning is simply one of many complex social processes occurring throughout graduate preparation programs, and scholarship that cannot address multifaceted dimensions of learning environments holds little utility in advancing the profession.

Furthermore, students' professional learning emerged from the interactions across and between multiple learning environments. In each environment, students encountered unique tools, community members, rules, and division of labor that affected their activity and experiences within and beyond those environments. This study, indeed, highlights the necessity of considering context when discussing professional learning. More importantly, though, it stresses the need to conceptualize context as a multidimensional and dynamic entity. Previous

student affairs graduate training literature (Freeman & Taylor, 2009; Hirt, 2009) defines context in one-dimensional terms such as institutional type and student characteristics. Exploring context in more granular detail, as this study does, provides greater insight into the learning that occurs within and the outcomes that emerge from graduate training. For example, closer attention to context reveals the specific tools available to students in various learning environments and how students utilize these tools in pursuing their evolving understandings of effective student affairs practice. Additionally, a multidimensional approach to context enables one to consider interactions between unique learning environments and the effects these interactions may have on new practitioners' sense of effective student affairs practice and their own work.

Refining Cultural-Historical Activity Theory

In addition to supporting the use of CHAT as a theoretical framework for understanding student affairs graduate preparation program, findings from this study offer insight for further refining CHAT and its use in empirical scholarship. Most recent CHAT scholarship has focused on joint activity across two adjoining activity systems (Cross, 2011; Roth & Lee, 2007; Yamagata-Lynch & Haudenschild, 2008). Such work informed this study's conceptual framework, which describes student affairs graduate preparation programs as two interconnected activity systems, the coursework system and the fieldwork system. Given the evidence students' professional learning occurred within and across both their coursework and their fieldwork, this study certainly supports the movement toward exploring joint activity.

However, this study also raises questions about defining joint activity as occurring between only two systems within empirical research. In this study, I consolidated students' experiences outside of the classroom into their fieldwork system and, as such, focused primarily on their graduate assistantship work. Some participants, nonetheless, identified powerful out-of-

classroom experiences not connected to their assistantship work or even office site. Ann taught an undergraduate leadership course. Dexter volunteered with student athlete services. Such evidence suggests the need for CHAT scholars to consider joint activity on larger scales than previously envisioned. At the same time, CHAT scholars must consider the practical implications and limitations of situating empirical work within increasingly complex arrangements of activity systems. Scholarship attempting to describe human activity across ever-expanding networks of learning environments may prove unwieldy in terms of data collection and analysis and ultimately lead to surface-level understandings of context that do little to inform educational practice.

Directing Future Research

This study offers foundation for learning-oriented perspectives on student affairs graduate preparation programs and, more generally, graduate professional education. Future research can build upon this study both to explore dimensions of professional learning during graduate training in greater detail and to consider these findings beyond the boundaries of student affairs graduate preparation programs. In doing so, future research may contribute to a richer body of literature on the essential processes of graduate professional education and the means for preparing practitioners for the complexities of human-centered work.

Longitudinal research on continued influence of graduate preparation. Participants in this study possessed strong sense of the tools and contexts that contributed to their professional learning during graduate training and would prepare them for full-time work. However, the extent to which graduate training actually does influence students' professional practice in their first post-graduation position and moving forward is beyond the scope of this study. Students may discover the tools they found so useful and relevant ultimately inadequate to

meet the demands of their new work. Students may also discover tools they deemed irrelevant to their practice much more applicable to their new work contexts and responsibilities. Longitudinal work on professional learning in student affairs graduate preparation could address not only the learning that occurs during graduate training but also how this learning influences and extends into individuals' professional career.

Role of social identity in sociocultural learning. Sociocultural learning theories, including CHAT, acknowledge learning processes are situated within and affected by broader social and cultural forces, including systems of inequality (Niewolny & Wilson, 2009). Although not the main focus of this study, systems of inequality manifested in student narratives and shaped how students perceived their learning environments. Both students of Color in this study, Ann and Jane, recounted overtly racist incidents occurring on or nearby Brady University's campus. Jake described how the election of President Trump, whose campaign frequently employed dog whistle politicking and appeals to racial resentment, had created a hostile campus climate. Further research should examine how students' social identities mediate their professional learning during graduate training and implications social identity has on dimensions of the activity system model. For example, future studies may examine how students' social identities inform how they interact with members of the community, the rules they perceive within a particular environment, and the tools they perceive they have access to and can use and adapt within a particular environment.

Faculty members and fieldwork supervisors. This study focused explicitly on the experiences and learning of graduate students. However, as this study's findings highlight, other actors play a large role in shaping graduate training experiences. Faculty members design and facilitate curriculum and set requirements regarding fieldwork experiences students must

complete in order to complete the program. Fieldwork supervisors provide professional opportunities that require greater responsibility, commitment, and complexity than students likely encountered in their undergraduate leadership positions and provide constructive feedback on students' professional practice. Additional research could more specifically explore how these groups of actors design the learning environments in which students operate. In acknowledging students' professional learning is distributed across and mediated by multiple learning environments, future research could also explore how these actors engage with and participate in activity systems outside their primary system and how this activity shapes students' professional learning.

Moving beyond student affairs graduate preparation. Numerous Master's programs in professional helping disciplines—teaching, social work, and nursing, for example—utilize a dual training model akin to that of student affairs preparation programs in which students engage in academic coursework and professional field experiences. Despite professional Master's students accounting for a large majority of graduate students in the United States, they remain underrepresented in the literature. The conceptual model used in this study—using CHAT to frame how students engage in goal-oriented activity across multiple learning environments—could easily be applied to these other disciplines in order to answer similar questions about how individuals learn a particular professional practice and the sociocultural environments that facilitate this learning. Such research could also illuminate if findings in this study are unique to student affairs preparation or are representative of broader issues in training individuals to do professional work through graduate education.

Implications for Practice

This study highlighted how students enrolled in Master's-level student affairs preparation programs navigate multiple learning environments as they train to enter the field and the ways in which these learning environments do and do not work together. Emerging practitioners need experiences in both their coursework and fieldwork that feel meaningful to their professional and that enable them to work toward their specific goals. Furthermore, they need greater support in navigating learning across these two worlds. As such, findings from this study have multiple implications for designing and implementing effective graduate preparation programs.

Rethinking Graduate Preparation Coursework

Faculty members design required coursework with best intentions about the content knowledge new practitioners need to encounter in preparing for the field and often aligned to professional guidelines (CAS, 2012). Despite these intentions, however, offered courses may be doing little to enhance students' professional practice and contribute to their long-term success in the field. Participants in this study frequently described courses as checklist items they needed to complete in order to earn their degree and, in turn, secure a job. In order to create coursework spaces that feel meaningful to students, faculty members must critically examine why courses are being offered and the extent to which they facilitate student learning. In doing so, they may strengthen the perceived relevance of coursework to students' professional practice.

Revision of coursework may take two forms. First, faculty members may choose to eliminate courses that simply do not meet professional needs or whose content could be subsumed by another course. For example, participants in this study referenced a general research methods course required of all graduate students. Both participants and faculty members acknowledged this course had little relevance for SAP program students. If faculty members

removed this course for the required curriculum, they could provide students with an alternate course better aligned to professional standards or allow students to pursue an elective course related to their unique goals and interests. Second, faculty members may choose to significantly overhaul a course in order to make the content more meaningful to students' professional practice. For the research course mentioned above, faculty members may revise the course content to focus more on consuming research to inform policy and practice and using research skills in assessment work. Both methods allow faculty members to build a curriculum more aligned to students' professional needs and aspirations, but curricular changes would likely involve organizational actors beyond the boundaries of a graduate preparation program. As such, faculty members should work within organizational constraints to implement the most influential changes possible.

At the heart of curricular revisions to graduate training programs is a commitment to student learning that undergirds the student affairs profession (ACPA & NASPA, 2004). That commitment requires faculty members to focus not on the courses being offered but instead on the learning that occurs, or does not occur, within those courses (Tagg, 2003). Rather than assuming students are prepared to enter the field because faculty members have exposed them to particular bodies of content knowledge, faculty members must critically evaluate if existing curricula meets the needs of students in helping them refine their professional practice and achieve their particular goals. In creating more opportunity for students to feel their coursework is relevant to and matters for their later professional careers, faculty members may enhance the coursework activity system as a site for professional learning and enable students to utilize new academic tools in their practice.

Situating Skill Development in Meaningful Contexts

Scholars have noted deficiencies in new practitioners' more administrative skills such as technology use and budgeting (Dickerson et al., 2011; Herdlein, 2004) and have consequently raised concerns about the structures of graduate training programs. In designing graduate program curricula, however, faculty members should be cognizant of situating skill development opportunities within meaningful learning contexts. A traditional academic course may not be the most ideal site for students to develop the budgeting skills, for example, mid- and senior-level practitioners so desire. Indeed, this study highlights how students discount knowledge they see as purely theoretical and disconnected from the realities of their day-to-day professional work. As such, faculty members should find new avenues for engaging students in skill development that leverage the power of their fieldwork activity system.

Participants in this study highlighted the power of fieldwork in allowing them to practice particular skills in a professional context. Faculty members could leverage these opportunities to assist students in building a range of skills required of them as they move into full-time work. For example, faculty members could collaborate with assistantship supervisors to create required skill development experiences students complete during their graduate studies regardless of their specific office placement. Supervisors would ensure students get some kind of practical experience regarding any number of competency areas including budgeting, assessment and evaluation, or technology use. Faculty members could support students by creating opportunities for them to reflect on these targeted fieldwork experiences and to make connections between these experiences and concepts from their existing coursework.

Connecting Actors across Activity Systems

Recommendations such as the previous one highlight the need to connect actors across activity systems. Findings from this study highlight how students traverse and learn across multiple learning environments. Although students accessed support systems in each activity system (i.e., faculty members in the coursework system and colleagues in the fieldwork system), they rarely could turn to individuals who fully understood both of the worlds they navigated. (A rare exception would be, for example, Ann's supervisor/mentor who had recently graduated from the SAP program.) By connecting relevant actors across activity systems, graduate preparation programs could foster more seamless transitions across learning environments and help students see connections between theory and practice they might otherwise not see.

The exact nature of these connections and how actors in one system interact with actors in another system would be dependent on roles within the graduate training experience. Fieldwork supervisors could assist students in constructing a larger image of professional work than students may immediately encounter. Possessing a broader perspective may enable students to hold on to academic material that may not immediately seem relevant to their practice. Dexter and Jane, for example, may have benefited from intentional conversations with their supervisors about how more senior practitioners use student development theory in career services work and how interpersonal relationships with students have shifted throughout their careers. In order to help students construct broader perspectives, fieldwork supervisors will need to understand exactly what content knowledge students are encountering in their coursework. As such, they will need to collaborate with faculty members in order to understand the specifics of the program curriculum and how they can introduce academic materials into fieldwork contexts.

Faculty members, additionally, will need to know when and why students are discounting content knowledge or not seeing it in their fieldwork. Although students can self-report such information, faculty members may also be served by continued conversation with fieldwork supervisors about what students are doing in their fieldwork and what opportunities students have to make connections between theory and practice on the job. For example, the SAP program faculty host a beginning-of-year meeting with assistantship providers to explain program curriculum and discuss means for fostering intentional conversations about theory in fieldwork experiences. Conversations such as these may need to occur more regularly throughout the academic year so that faculty members have better sense of the extent to which fieldwork supervisors are making efforts to help students integrate learning across their learning environments.

Fieldwork Supervisors as Educators

Fieldwork supervisors and colleagues serve as powerful forces in shaping how graduate students conceptualize the student affairs profession and effective student affairs practice. In addition to collaborating with faculty members, fieldwork supervisors need to consider how they serve as educators in preparing for new practitioners for the field and how the scope of students' fieldwork duties create opportunities for learning. Although some fieldwork supervisors in this study made small attempts at discussing coursework with students—for example, Jake and Ann discussed having very occasional conversations with their respective supervisors—students reported few opportunities to intentionally connect theory and practice in the course of their jobs. Instead, supervisors focused more on exposing students to functional area-related administrative practices. As such, students gravitated toward accruing administrative experiences, which they

felt would best prepare them for post-graduation work, and generally away from utilizing theoretical or scholarly knowledge.

However, good student affairs practice involves integration of theory and practice (ACPA & NASPA, 2015), and graduate students need to see that integration modeled throughout their training. The theory-to-practice opportunities SAP program faculty members embedded in coursework activities and assignments were not enough to help students fully realize the utility of theoretical knowledge in doing student affairs work. Additionally, the absence of modeled theory-practice integration in fieldwork systems may have worked against faculty members' efforts in coursework contexts. Fieldwork supervisors should ensure graduate students' responsibilities includes engagement in theoretical knowledge as a basis for and essential part of their professional practice. When fieldwork supervisors expose students solely to administrative duties and do not provide intentional opportunities to consider how coursework applies to fieldwork, students develop a conceptualization of doing student affairs work that does not include strong emphasis of using theory-in-practice.

Such a shift in the job responsibilities given to graduate students necessitates a broader shift in how the units who house these students think about their work. Whereas SAP program faculty members focused on students' holistic professional development, fieldwork offices appeared more focused on meeting their bottom line. Graduate students provided additional administrative labor. Given shifts in graduate education funding and increasing competition amongst programs to offer the most attractive funding packages (e.g., tuition waiver, stipend) possible, preparation program faculty members may have little say in where fieldwork experiences are available and what job responsibilities in those units will entail. At Brady University, for example, senior administrators increasingly pushed for graduate assistantship

funding in more academic-facing units (e.g., academic advising offices) rather than student affairs units. Thus, the burden rests on fieldwork supervisors to initiate necessary changes in helping students make explicit and lasting connections between their coursework and fieldwork.

Training Graduate Students for Lifelong Professional Learning

Graduate students in this study enjoyed learning concrete skills in their work so they felt prepared for life after graduate training. They learned how to manage student staffs, adjudicate conduct cases, and plan career fairs. As they looked toward their post-graduation work, students felt more prepared having had these experiences. A two-year program, however, will not expose individuals to every skill and scenario they will need throughout their student affairs career. In addition to helping students build essential skills for post-graduation work, graduate preparation programs should help students cultivate an orientation toward learning throughout their careers. Such an orientation will allow practitioners to adapt to changing dimensions of the profession (e.g., student demographics, modes of interfacing with higher education institutions) and new organizational realities they have never encountered.

Corollary to graduate programs helping students orient toward lifelong professional learning, of course, is the requirement that supervisors of new practitioners invest in them and provide continued training that builds upon the foundation created during graduate training. Previous literature (Cuyjet et al., 2009) describes how supervisors of new practitioners may need to provide additional training in order to address perceived deficiencies of graduate training programs. Rather than situating continued professional development as an undue burden placed upon mid- and senior-level administrators, however, the profession needs cement such practices as necessary and expected for all entry-level practitioners. Although graduate training programs provide focused and intensive space for professional development, they are by no means a silver

bullet in preparing individuals for the field. Continued commitment to the professional learning embedded in graduate preparation programs is essential for training and retaining individuals who can do the complex yet necessary work of student affairs practice.

Conclusion

This study explored how students enrolled in Master's-level student affairs preparation programs learn to do student affairs work during their graduate training by leveraging cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT), a sociocultural perspective on learning. Findings highlighted how professional learning exists across and is mediated by the unique coursework and fieldwork environments students occupy during graduate school. Furthermore, when students make meaningful connections between their graduate school experiences and the work they seek to do in the future, they incorporate tools into their professional practice. When those connections are not made, they abandon tools. Contradictions emerging within and across learning environments also shapes the professional learning process by creating opportunities for students to reconcile dissonance.

This study has implications for research and practice. Future research should continue to center learning in discussions about student affairs graduate programs and preparation for the field. This study provides foundation for additional work on the continued influence of graduate training on student affairs practice, the role of social identities in the process of professional learning, and the ways in which faculty members and fieldwork supervisors construct environments that facilitate professional learning. Future work may also apply the conceptual model grounding this study to graduate training in other professional disciplines. Findings from this study can be used to inform the design and implementation of student affairs preparation programs. Individuals working with graduate training programs should closely examine the

relevance of existing coursework and find ways of situating skill development in contexts best suited to facilitate student learning. Furthermore, faculty members and fieldwork supervisors should collaborate in helping students traverse and make meaning from multiple learning environments. Ultimately, graduate students and those who work with graduate students and new practitioners need to understand professional learning as a process that extends well beyond the two years of graduate training.

I began this dissertation study as a doctoral student interested in how we train people to do the complex yet necessary work of being educators for college students. I conclude this study as a faculty member embedded within a student affairs graduate preparation program. The students whom I now work with are not so different from Jake, Ann, Jane, and Dexter, who lent their voices to this study. The courses I now teach are not so different from those required in Brady University's SAP program curriculum. Like the participants in this study, my professional curiosities and instincts are honed through experience. I am now "doing the work," as Dexter would say. Now more than ever, I see the necessity of providing excellent training for our field and the significant challenges in doing so. However, I continue to see focused and nuanced discussion of our learning, in addition to the learning of the students we serve, as the promising way forward.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Recruitment Letter to Program Site

Graham F. Hunter
Doctoral Candidate
Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Education
College of Education, Michigan State University
325 E. 8th St., Apt. 609
Cincinnati, OH 45202

[INSERT DATE]

Dear Dr. [INSERT LAST NAME],

My name is Graham Hunter, and I am a doctoral candidate in the Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Education (HALE) program at Michigan State University. I am currently working on my dissertation exploring how graduate students learn to do student affairs work during their graduate training. I believe this research can benefit the profession by contributing to our understanding of how graduate students learn to do complex work and the role of preparation programs in supporting student learning.

Although student affairs graduate preparation programs play a vital role in preparing new practitioners for full-time work in field, scholars (e.g., Cooper, Mitchell, Eckerle, & Martin, 2016; Herdlein, 2004; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008) have highlighted concerns about the readiness of recent graduates to tackle the complexities of student affairs work. Whereas professional literature has focused extensively on the socialization experiences of graduate students (e.g., Kuk & Cuyjet, 2009; Liddell, Wilson, Pasquesi, Hirschy, & Boyle, 2014; Perez, 2016; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008), much less attention has been given to perspectives that center issues of learning. Scholarship grounded in a learning orientation can aid the profession by adding complexity to understandings of how individuals develop an effective professional practice for maintaining and sustaining student affairs work. Additionally, it can enrich conversations about the practices and priorities of graduate preparation.

As such, my study explores students' professional learning during their graduate training. I am especially focused on a sociocultural approach to graduate students' learning. This approach frames learning as interdependent process involving complex networks of human activity and negotiations between individuals and their social environments. Exploring issues of professional learning, then, necessitates understanding not only individual students but also the social, cultural, and material environments in which those students operate.

In order to understand this process of professional learning, I would like to conduct a case study of your Master's-level student affairs preparation program. This case study would involve several dimensions of data collection.

(1) Interviews. I would like to conduct interviews with first- and second-year students enrolled in your program during the 2017-2018 academic year. Students who choose to participate would be interviewed two times, with each conversation lasting approximately

60-90 minutes. I would conduct the first interview in early fall 2017 and the second interview in early spring 2018. I would also like to speak with you and several other core faculty members in order to learn more about your program.

(2) Document collection. I would like to gather materials that contribute to my understanding of the program and students' learning experiences in the program. This may include program vision statements, curriculum, and syllabi from individual courses. I will also ask student participants to share pieces of work (e.g., course assignments, reflection papers) illustrating what and how they are learning during graduate training.

Given the sensitive nature of this project, the identity of your institution, program, and all participants will remain confidential. No identifying information will be disclosed in the dissertation or any subsequent manuscripts. To ensure institutional and individual confidentiality, my study will follow guidelines set forth by Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program.

If your program is willing to participate in this study or you would like to speak more about the specifics of my study, please email me at huntergr@msu.edu or call me at (910) 398-1821. You may also contact the chair of my dissertation committee, Dr. Matthew Wawrzynski, at mwawrzyn@msu.edu. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Graham F. Hunter

APPENDIX B: Recruitment Letter to Student Participants

Subject: Invitation to Participate in Study of Professional Learning in Graduate Preparation

Dear student,

My name is Graham Hunter, and I am a doctoral candidate in the Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Education (HALE) program at Michigan State University. I am requesting your participation in my dissertation study, entitled *Professional Learning in Student Affairs Graduate Preparation.*

The purpose of my study is to explore how graduate students learn to do student affairs work during their graduate preparation. This study is intended to further the profession's knowledge about how individuals learn to do complex work and the role of graduate programs in shaping new practitioners' professional practice. Participants may find their involvement in this study beneficial since it provides a unique opportunity to reflect upon their experience in graduate school and contribute to scholarship on student affairs graduate preparation.

Your participation in this study would involve several dimensions:

(1) You will participate in two interviews, each lasting 60-90 minutes. The first interview will occur in early fall 2017, and the second interview will occur in early spring 2018. These interviews would be audio-recorded.
(2) I will be collecting written documents to help me better understand what students are learning and experiencing during the program. I will ask you to submit, at your discretion, any materials (e.g., reflection papers, course assignments) that illustrate what and how you are learning through participation in [INSERT PROGRAM NAME].

If you decide to participate, you will be compensated with a $20 Amazon gift card at the end of your second interview.

Although the results of this study will be published as a dissertation, all of the information you provide will be kept confidential. The contents of your interviews and provided documents will not be shared with other members of the [INSERT PROGRAM NAME] community.

If you are interested in participating in this study, I will be on campus at [INSERT INSTITUTION] on [INSERT DATES] to conduct interviews. Please respond to this email with your available dates and times during this window to conduct your first interview. If we cannot find a time to meet during my visit, we can potentially schedule a phone or Skype interview.

If you have further questions about this study or your role as a participant, please email me at huntergr@msu.edu or call me at (910) 398-1821. You may also contact the chair of my dissertation committee, Dr. Matthew Wawrzynski, at mwawrzyn@msu.edu.

Thank you for your time! I look forward to speaking with you.

Best,
Graham Hunter

APPENDIX C: Recruitment Letter to Program Faculty Members

Subject: Invitation to Participate in Study of Professional Learning in Graduate Preparation

Dear Dr. [INSERT LAST NAME],

My name is Graham Hunter, and I am a doctoral candidate in the Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Education (HALE) program at Michigan State University. I am requesting your participation in my dissertation study, entitled *Professional Learning in Student Affairs Graduate Preparation.*

The purpose of my study is to explore how graduate students learn to do student affairs work during their graduate preparation and the ways in which this professional learning is located within, distributed across, and mediated by a particular community. This study is intended to further the profession's knowledge about how individuals learn to do complex work and the role of graduate programs in shaping new practitioners' professional practice.

Although my study focuses primarily on student experiences, I am also interested in speaking with faculty members about graduate preparation in [INSERT PROGRAM NAME]. If you are willing, I would to schedule a time to speak with you. This conversation would last approximately 60 minutes and would be scheduled at your convenience. I will be on campus at [INSERT INSTITUTION] on [INSERT DATES] but can also meet via phone or Skype. Please let me know if you are available to meet have preferred meeting times.

If you have further questions about this study, please email me at huntergr@msu.edu or call me at (910) 398-1821. You may also contact the chair of my dissertation committee, Dr. Matthew Wawrzynski, at mwawrzyn@msu.edu.

Thank you for your time! I look forward to speaking with you.

Best,
Graham Hunter

APPENDIX D: Student Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent Form
Professional Learning in Student Affairs Graduate Preparation

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Researchers are required to provide a consent form to inform you about the research study, to convey that participation is voluntary, to explain risks and benefits of participation, and to empower you to make an informed decision. You should feel free to ask the researchers any questions you may have.

Principal Investigator: Graham Hunter, Doctoral candidate, Michigan State University
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Matthew Wawrzynski, Department of Educational Administration, Michigan State University

Project Description
This study explores how Master's students enrolled in a student affairs preparation program learn to do student affairs work during their graduate training. This study is intended to further the profession's knowledge about how individuals learn to do complex work and the role of graduate programs in shaping new practitioners' professional practice.

What You Will Do
1. Participants will participate in two one-on-one interviews (fall 2017, spring 2018). Each interview will last approximately 60-90 minutes and will be audio recorded.
2. Participants will be asked to provide existing documents such as course assignments and reflection papers reflecting demonstrating what and how they are learning during graduate training. Participants will have discretion over what, if any, documents they submit. Document submission is **not required** for participation in this study.

Potential Benefits and Risks
1. Participants may benefit from confidential space to reflect upon and make meaning of their experiences in graduate training.
2. There are no foreseeable risks associated with participation in this study greater than that encountered in daily life.

Privacy and Confidentiality
1. Individual privacy will be protected in accordance with Human Subjects Protection protocols at MSU.
2. The data for this project will be kept confidential and information about you will be kept confidential to the maximum extent allowable by law.
3. The data are being coded and de-identified with use of pseudonyms in order to maintain confidentiality of individual information.
4. Raw data (e.g., interview and observation notes) will be stored in a locked file cabinet.
5. Electronic data (e.g., interview audio files and transcripts) will be stored in password-protected files on a computer used for research purposes only.

6. Only the following entities will have access to the data: Graham Hunter (principal investigator); Dr. Matthew Wawrzynski (faculty advisor); and the Michigan State University Institutional Review Board.
7. The results of this study may be published or presented at professional meetings, but the identities of all research participants will remain anonymous.

Your Rights to Participate, Say No, or Withdraw

1. Participation in this research project is completely voluntary.
2. You have the right to decline participation in this study; additionally, you may change your mind at any time and withdraw from the study.
3. You may choose not to answer specific questions or to stop participating in an interview at any time.
4. You may choose to not provide any additional work illustrating your learning or contact information for your fieldwork supervisor.

Costs and Compensation for Participation

1. Participation in this study will be of no cost to you.
2. You will be compensated with a $20 Amazon gift certificate after your second interview for participation in this study.

Contact Information

1. If you have concerns or questions about this study, please contact the principal investigator or, alternatively, the faculty advisor:

Graham Hunter Principal Investigator	325 E. 8th St., Apt. 609, Cincinnati, OH 45202 (910) 398-1821 huntergr@msu.edu
Dr. Matthew Wawrzynski Faculty Advisor	427 Erickson Hall, East Lansing, MI 48824 (517) 355-6617 mwawrzyn@msu.edu

2. If you have questions or concerns about your role and rights as a research participant, would like to obtain information or offer input, or would like to register a complaint about this study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program:

Michigan State University Human Research Protection Program	408 West Circle Drive, Olds Hall Room 207, MSU, East Lansing, MI 48824 (517) 335-2180 (phone) (517) 432-4503 (fax) irb@msu.edu

Documentation of Informed Consent

Please sign below if you are willing to participate today and be contacted again for later participation in this study:

_____	_____	_____
Participant's Name (Please print)	Participant's Signature	Date
_____	_____	_____
Interviewer's Name (Please print)	Interviewer's Signature	Date

APPENDIX E: Student Information Form

Participant Information Form
Professional Learning in Student Affairs Graduate Preparation

CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: _____

Mailing address: _____

_____

Cell phone: _____

Email: _____

EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

Undergraduate institution & graduation year: _____

Undergraduate majors & minors: _____

EMPLOYMENT HISTORY

Have you held full-time employment prior to beginning graduate school? _____

If yes, indicate the position(s), employer(s), and number of years employed in each position:

_____

_____

FIELDWORK INFORMATION

Name of position: _____

Name of office & institution: _____

Time in the position: _____

If you have participated in other fieldwork experiences, list the position, office, institution, and time in the position:

_____

_____

COURSEWORK INFORMATION

Please list any graduate coursework you have taken outside of the required [INSERT PROGRAM NAME] core courses:

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Semester & year enrolled in [INSERT PROGRAM NAME]: _____

Racial & ethnic identities: _____

Gender identity: _____

Sexual orientation: _____

Other salient identities: _____

APPENDIX F: Time 1 Student Interview Protocol

Student Interview #1
Professional Learning in Student Affairs Graduate Preparation

Introduction to the Interview	
Review purpose of the study	• "This study explores how students learn to do student affairs work during their graduate preparation."

Review and sign informed consent form	• My role as an interviewer and researcher
	• Participant can skip questions or end the interview at any time
	• Measures for confidentiality
	  ○ Information will not be shared with peers, faculty members, or fieldwork supervisors
	  ○ Pseudonyms used to de-identity information
	  ○ Does the participant have a preferred pseudonym?
	• Interview will last approximately 60-90 minutes
	• Compensation provided after second interview
	• Clarify participants will be asked for fieldwork supervisor information and additional program-related materials – this is optional and not required for participation in the study
	• Opportunity to ask questions at the end of the interview

Review and fill out participant information form	• Answer clarifying questions as necessary • We can discuss sharing fieldwork supervisor information at the end of the interview
Provide overview of interview structure	• I will ask open-ended questions • I may ask for specific examples or ask follow-up questions in order to fully understand your experiences • There are no right or wrong answers
Turn on audio recorder	• State the date and time

Section 1: Establishing Rapport and Gathering Background Information		
I would like to start by getting to know a little about	Potential probing questions: • Tell me about where you are from.	Activity System Focus:

you. Tell me about your background and what brought you to [INSERT PROGRAM NAME].	• Tell me about your undergraduate experience – what was it like? • Tell me about what you were doing before coming to graduate school. • What made you want to pursue a career in student affairs? • How did you decide to come to [INSERT PROGRAM NAME]?	• Subject
I'm curious about your personal goals for your time in this program. Tell me about what you want to accomplish by the time you graduate.	Potential probing questions: • How did you develop those particular goals? • What kind of work do you want to do after this program? • What does it mean, for you, to an effective student affairs educator?	Activity System Focus: • Subject • Objects
I'm curious about your general impressions of the program. Tell me about [INSERT PROGRAM NAME].	Potential probing questions: • How would you describe the values of the program? • How was the transition to graduate school? • How has the program met or not met your expectations?	Activity System Focus: • Community • Rules

Section 2: Exploring the Coursework Activity System		
I'm interested in what and how students are learning in their coursework and fieldwork. I would like to spend some time fleshing our your experiences in coursework contexts.		
Tell me about the courses you've taken in [INSERT PROGRAM NAME].	Potential probing questions: • How meaningful has coursework been to you? • To what extent is coursework helping you meet the personal goals you identified earlier? • Tell me about a particularly meaningful course.	Activity System Focus: • Subject • Tools • Objects
I'd like to know more about what a typical class session looks like. Walk me through that.	Potential probing questions: • What kind of preparation do you do before class? • How is the classroom arranged? • What kind of materials do you use during a class session? • How would you describe the interactions between students? • How would you describe the interactions between students and the instructor?	Activity System Focus: • Tools • Rules • Community • Division of labor

	• Are there major differences in how various instructors run their courses?	
What are you learning about student affairs work through your courses?	Potential probing questions: • What are some of the big lessons or ideas you've taken from your courses? • How has coursework changed who you are as a student affairs educator? • How has coursework changed how you think about student affairs work?	Activity System Focus: • Tools • Objects
How are you learning about student affairs work through your courses?	Potential probing questions: • What kind of assignments do you do for your courses? • How helpful do you find course assignments? • Tell me about a particularly meaningful assignment or learning experience.	Activity System Focus: • Tools • Objects

Section 3: Exploring the Fieldwork Activity System		
We have spent some time fleshing out your experiences in coursework. I'd like to now spend some time fleshing out your experiences in your fieldwork placement.		
Tell me about your fieldwork placement.	Potential probing questions: • What does your unit do? • What are your specific job responsibilities? • Who else works in the unit? • How meaningful has fieldwork been to you? • To what extent is fieldwork helping you meet the personal goals you identified earlier? • How would you describe your relationship with your supervisor?	Activity System Focus: • Subject • Tools • Objects • Rules • Community • Division of Labor
I'd like to know more about what a typical day at your fieldwork placement looks like. Walk me through that.	Potential probing questions: • What kind of activities are you doing? • Who are you interacting with throughout the day? • What tools do you use to do your job?	Activity System Focus: • Community • Tools • Division of Labor
What are you learning about student affairs work through your fieldwork?	Potential probing questions: • What are some of the big lessons or ideas you've taken from fieldwork?	Activity System Focus: • Tools

	• How has fieldwork changed who you are as a student affairs educator? • How has fieldwork changed how you think about student affairs work?	• Rules • Objects
How are you learning about student affairs work through your fieldwork	Potential probing questions: • How helpful do you find the work you do in your fieldwork placement? • Tell me about a particularly meaningful learning experience that occurred in your fieldwork placement.	Activity System Focus: • Tools • Objects

Section 4: Exploring Activity System(s) Contradictions		
In order for me to better understand your learning process, it's helpful for me to understand any dilemmas or challenging experiences you encountered in [INSERT PROGRAM NAME].		
What challenges have you experienced in coursework and fieldwork?	Potential probing questions: • Tell me about a specific challenging situation – how did you respond? • Who do you turn to when you facing a challenge?	Activity System Focus: • Contradictions • Tools • Community
To what extent do you feel tension between expectations from your academic program and expectations from your fieldwork placement?	Potential probing questions: • Do your course instructors and fieldwork colleagues value the same things? • How does coursework show up in your fieldwork activities? • How does fieldwork show up in your coursework activities?	Activity System Focus: • Contradictions • Rules • Joint activity

Wrap-Up	
Conclude the interview	• Ask if participant has any remaining questions about the study • Thank participant for their time • Provide copy of informed consent form • Turn off audio recorder
Discuss participant providing supervisor information	• Remind participant that providing contact information is not required and content of student's interview would not be shared with their supervisor • Fill out remainder of participant information form
Discuss participant sharing additional documents illustrating learning	• Remind participant that providing additional documents is not required • Explain identifying information will be redacted

	• Give examples of helpful documents

APPENDIX G: Time 2 Student Interview Protocol

Student Interview #2
Professional Learning in Student Affairs Graduate Preparation

Introduction to the Interview	
Review purpose of the study	• "This study explores how students learn to do student affairs work during their graduate preparation."

Review and sign informed consent form	• My role as an interviewer and researcher
	• Participant can skip questions or end the interview at any time
	• Measures for confidentiality
	  ○ Information will not be shared with peers, faculty members, or fieldwork supervisors
	  ○ Pseudonyms used to de-identity information
	  ○ Does the participant have a preferred pseudonym?
	• Interview will last approximately 60-90 minutes
	• Compensation provided after second interview
	• Opportunity to ask questions at the end of the interview

Review participant information form	• Are there any changes you need to make from your original form?
Provide overview of interview structure	• We will start by discussing the activity system map I drew based on our first interview. • I will ask open-ended questions • I may ask for specific examples or ask follow-up questions in order to fully understand your experiences • There are no right or wrong answers
Turn on audio recorder	• State the date and time

Section 1: General Updates		
I would like to start with an update on how graduate school is going for you. What's new or different since the last time we talked?	Potential probing questions: • Tell me about your classes. • Tell me about your fieldwork. • What is it like living in this area?	Activity System Focus: • Subject

How are you thinking differently about student affairs?	Potential probing questions: • Have your goals changed in any ways?	Activity System Focus: • Subject • Objects

Section 2: Revisiting the Coursework Activity System		
Provide overview of the student's coursework activity system. Highlight the six constructs as well as any relevant contradictions you identified.		
What are your initial reactions to this map?	Potential probing questions: • How does it resonate with your experiences? • How does it not resonate? • What changes would you make to this map based on your experiences since the last time we talked?	Activity System Focus: • Subject • Tools • Objects • Rules • Community • Division of Labor • Contradictions
What are you learning about student affairs work through your courses?	Potential probing questions: • What are some of the big lessons or ideas you've taken from your courses? • How has coursework changed who you are as a student affairs educator? How has coursework changed how you think about student affairs work?	Activity System Focus: • Tools • Objects
How are you learning about student affairs work through your courses?	Potential probing questions: • What kind of assignments do you do for your courses? • How helpful do you find course assignments? Tell me about a particularly meaningful assignment or learning experience.	Activity System Focus: • Tools • Objects
What other thoughts do you have about your coursework that we haven't touched on yet?		

Section 2: Revisiting the Fieldwork Activity System		
Provide overview of the student's fieldwork activity system. Highlight the six constructs as well as any relevant contradictions you identified.		
What are your initial reactions to this map?	Potential probing questions: • How does it resonate with your experiences?	Activity System Focus: • Subject

	• How does it not resonate? • What changes would you make to this map based on your experiences since the last time we talked?	• Tools • Objects • Rules • Community • Division of Labor • Contradictions
What are you learning about student affairs work through your fieldwork?	Potential probing questions: • What are some of the big lessons or ideas you've taken from fieldwork? • How has fieldwork changed who you are as a student affairs educator? How has fieldwork changed how you think about student affairs work?	Activity System Focus: • Tools • Rules • Objects
How are you learning about student affairs work through your fieldwork	Potential probing questions: • How helpful do you find the work you do in your fieldwork placement? Tell me about a particularly meaningful learning experience that occurred in your fieldwork placement.	Activity System Focus: • Tools • Objects
What other thoughts do you have about your fieldwork that we haven't touched on yet?		

Section 4: Revisiting Activity System(s) Contradictions		
In order for me to better understand your learning process, it's helpful for me to understand any dilemmas or challenging experiences you encountered in [INSERT PROGRAM NAME] since the last time we talked.		
What challenges have you experienced in coursework and fieldwork?	Potential probing questions: • Tell me about a specific challenging situation – how did you respond? • Who do you turn to when you facing a challenge?	Activity System Focus: • Contradictions • Tools • Community
To what extent do you feel tension between expectations from your academic program and expectations from your fieldwork placement?	Potential probing questions: • Do your course instructors and fieldwork colleagues value the same things? • How does coursework show up in your fieldwork activities? • How does fieldwork show up in your coursework activities?	Activity System Focus: • Contradictions • Rules • Joint activity

Wrap-Up

Conclude the interview	• Ask if participant has any remaining questions about the study • Thank participant for their time • Provide copy of informed consent form • Turn off audio recorder • Provide participant with $20 Amazon gift card
Discuss participant sharing additional documents illustrating learning	• Remind participant that providing additional documents is not required • Explain identifying information will be redacted • Give examples of helpful documents

APPENDIX H: Faculty Member Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent Form
Professional Learning in Student Affairs Graduate Preparation

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Researchers are required to provide a consent form to inform you about the research study, to convey that participation is voluntary, to explain risks and benefits of participation, and to empower you to make an informed decision. You should feel free to ask the researchers any questions you may have.

Principal Investigator: Graham Hunter, Doctoral candidate, Michigan State University
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Matthew Wawrzynski, Department of Educational Administration, Michigan State University

Project Description
This study explores how Master's students enrolled in a student affairs preparation program learn to do student affairs work during their graduate training. This study is intended to further the profession's knowledge about how individuals learn to do complex work and the role of graduate programs in shaping new practitioners' professional practice.

What You Will Do
1. You will participate in a single one-on-one interview. This interview will last approximately 60 minutes and will be audio recorded

Potential Benefits and Risks
1. Participants may benefit from confidential space to reflect upon and make meaning of their work within a graduate preparation program.
2. There are no foreseeable risks associated with participation in this study greater than that encountered in daily life.

Privacy and Confidentiality
1. Individual privacy will be protected in accordance with Human Subjects Protection protocols at MSU.
2. The data for this project will be kept confidential and information about you will be kept confidential to the maximum extent allowable by law.
3. The data are being coded and de-identified with use of pseudonyms in order to maintain confidentiality of individual information.
4. Raw data (e.g., interview notes) will be stored in a locked file cabinet.
5. Electronic data (e.g., interview audio files and transcripts) will be stored in password-protected files on a computer used for research purposes only.
6. Only the following entities will have access to the data: Graham Hunter (principal investigator); Dr. Matthew Wawrzynski (faculty advisor); and the Michigan State University Institutional Review Board.
7. The results of this study may be published or presented at professional meetings, but the identities of all research participants will remain anonymous.

Your Rights to Participate, Say No, or Withdraw

1. Participation in this research project is completely voluntary.
2. You have the right to decline participation in this study; additionally, you may change your mind at any time and withdraw from the study.
3. You may choose not to answer specific questions or to stop participating in the interview at any time.

Costs and Compensation for Participation

1. Participation in this study will be of no cost to you.
2. There is no compensation for participation in this study.

Contact Information

1. If you have concerns or questions about this study, please contact the principal investigator or, alternatively, the faculty advisor:

Graham Hunter Principal Investigator	325 E. 8th St., Apt. 609, Cincinnati, OH 45202 (910) 398-1821 huntergr@msu.edu
Dr. Matthew Wawrzynski Faculty Advisor	427 Erickson Hall, East Lansing, MI 48824 (517) 355-6617 mwawrzyn@msu.edu

2. If you have questions or concerns about your role and rights as a research participant, would like to obtain information or offer input, or would like to register a complaint about this study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program:

Michigan State University Human Research Protection Program	408 West Circle Drive, Olds Hall Room 207, MSU, East Lansing, MI 48824 (517) 335-2180 (phone) (517) 432-4503 (fax) irb@msu.edu

Documentation of Informed Consent

Please sign below if you are willing to participate in this study:

_____	_____	_____
Participant's Name (Please print)	Participant's Signature	Date
_____	_____	_____
Interviewer's Name (Please print)	Interviewer's Signature	Date

APPENDIX I: Faculty Member Interview Protocol

Program Faculty Member Interview
Professional Learning in Student Affairs Graduate Preparation

Introduction to the Interview	
Review purpose of the study	• "This study explores how students learn to do student affairs work during their graduate preparation. In addition to speaking with students, I am interested in hearing faculty members' perspectives on graduate preparation for student affairs work."

Review and sign informed consent form	• My role as an interviewer and researcher
	• Participant can skip questions or end the interview at any time
	• Measures for confidentiality
	  ○ Information will not be shared with students or faculty colleagues
	  ○ Pseudonyms used to de-identity information
	• Interview will last approximately 60 minutes
	• Opportunity to ask questions at the end of the interview

Turn on audio recorder	• State the date and time

Gathering Background Information on Faculty Member	
I would like to start by learning more about your career path. What led you to a faculty position in a student affairs graduate preparation program?	Potential probing questions: • What lead you to the field of student affairs? • Do you have prior experience as a practitioner?
What do you find rewarding about teaching in a graduate preparation program? What do you find challenging?	

Gathering Background Information on Program (Program Coordinator ONLY)	
What are the desired outcomes of this preparation program?	Potential probing questions: • How does the program achieve those outcomes? • How would you describe graduates of this program?
Tell me about your student population.	Potential probing questions:

	• What kinds of students are attracted to this program?
	• What are the demographics of the student population?
	  ○ Race, gender, age
	  ○ Proportion of students who enter directly from undergraduate studies compared to those with full-time work experience

Tell me about your curriculum.	Potential probing questions:
	• What are the core program courses?
	  ○ Why are these central to program outcomes?
	  ○ How are they sequenced?
	• What are the expectations around supervised practice experiences?
	• How, if at all, are supervised practice and coursework experiences integrated?

Teaching and Course Instruction	
Tell me about the courses you teach.	Potential probing questions: • What are the goals of those courses? • How do you work toward those goals in the courses? • How do you define your approach to teaching? • How, if at all, are supervised practice experiences integrated into the courses you teach?

Perception of Student Experiences and Learning	
What kind of expectations do students bring into this program?	Potential probing questions: • What assumptions do they have about student affairs work? • What do they think graduate school will be like? • How do these expectations influence your interactions with students?
What do students tend to find the most challenging about graduate preparation?	Potential probing questions: • Why do you think these issues are particularly challenging for students? • Do these issues change between students' first and second year in the program?

How would you describe successful students in this program?	Potential probing questions: • Focus on particular examples and stories • Probe for student activity – what are successful students doing and thinking?
How would you describe students who struggle in this program?	Potential probing questions: • Focus on particular examples and stories • Probe for student activity – what are struggling students doing and thinking?

Wrap-Up	
Conclude the interview	• Ask if participant has any remaining questions about the study • Thank participant for their time • Provide copy of informed consent form • Turn off audio recorder

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REFERENCES

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