“PREPARE THEM TO LEAVE WELL”: STORIES OF FORMER STUDENT AFFAIRS PROFESSIONALS’ CAREER CHANGE

By

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the career changes of former student affairs (SA) professionals who left campus-based work for adjacent or new industries to understand their experiences. This study expands the SA career scholarship and helps current SA scholars and professionals understand the full range of career experiences in the field by presenting the stories of former SA professionals with diverse positionalities who broke away from the SA career. Using story as a methodology and an interpretive framework informed by life course perspectives, I aimed to answer the following research question: How did former student affairs professionals experience their career change?

The findings suggested that former SA professionals experienced career change in the following ways: (1) Career Needs, Values, and Turning Points, which refer to the influence of early life career needs and values of stability, support, consistency, well-being, agency, and inclusion as well as turning points in the student affairs career involving concerns with salary, workplace exclusion, privileged students, work-life integration, and supervisors in driving participants' decision to change careers; (2) Constraints and Resources, which illustrate the role the student affairs profession, family and community, and new workplaces, and the linked lives within these contexts, in shaping participants' transitions through constraints (i.e., lack of information, disapproval from colleagues and mentors, skepticism, and exclusion) and resources (i.e., supportive colleagues, transferable skills and knowledge, financial assistance, informational support, networking, work-life integration, social support, and professional growth opportunities); and (3) Exercising Agency, which points to participants' efforts to shape their experience by planning their career change and supporting others' career development in student affairs, even after leaving the field. Considering the findings, this dissertation argues that former

SA professionals experienced career change based on the interaction between their early lives and career turning points, external settings and actors, and individual decisions, reflecting their diverse positionalities. This study calls on the SA field to meet its workforce's diverse career development needs by not only improving SA careers for those who choose to remain or return but also by further studying and supporting career changes beyond campus-based education.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Leaving Student Affairs: My Mentors' Stories of Career Change

> *People want to be innovative and push academia, but the system is not built to think out of the box. The system is broken for me…a cycle of abuse. I feel hopelessness because I feel stuck and I'm in a really bad situation and then I have moments that are good, I have an interview...If I get out of the field, will I feel hopeful, excited or is a career change a band-aid to the real problem?* —Nel, former Director in Student Affairs

> *I still feel this deep sense of betrayal…I'm trying to sort that out in my healing. For a long time, I knew what my calling was, supporting others, and students, and now I have to support myself and I don't know how to…Will I ever emerge from this? Will anything ever feel right again? If I leave [higher education] altogether, what if it doesn't work out? I feel trapped.* —Afreewomxn, former Assistant Dean in Student Affairs

I met Nel eleven years ago as an undergraduate student in the U.S. and, eventually, she served as a powerful mentor to me, shaping my decision to pursue a student affairs (SA) career. Nel's tenure in SA spanned 16 years, culminating in a mid-level role (e.g., Director). Nel also held a prominent presidential leadership role with a U.S. higher education (HE) association.

Within her SA career, Nel identified broadly as a communicator, a leader, and a storyteller. Her dominant identities (i.e., white, cisgender, middle-class, able-bodied, U.S. citizen, and heterosexual) and her target identities (i.e., first-generation student, woman, mom, and age) also informed her SA career. When we first spoke, Nel was contemplating leaving SA. In describing her career goals, Nel shared that she "wants to have a larger impact," reflecting on the role she once played as a HE association president. When describing what troubled her the most, Nel shared that she no longer felt valued in the SA field and began to weigh a career change. Changing careers also troubled Nel. She explained, "I worry about ageism…because I've invested too long into my career…I am worried I won't be able to get out because I'm trapped…my experience is hurting me…I have too much experience to start over." When asked to share what needs to be solved, Nel noted that because she belongs to "a [HE] system that has

not changed for hundreds of years…This [career] move for [her] is about solving working conditions, feeling valued." When I asked Nel to describe the emotional impact of this looming transition, she noted, "It evolves every day…good days and bad days. I feel hopelessness because I feel stuck and I'm in a really bad situation, and then I have moments that are good, I have an interview…then I'm in the office, I get pulled down in the hopeless phase." Nel's hopelessness stemmed from her belief that she is "the real problem" instead of SA, fearing that a career change may not improve, or worsen, her sense of self. Since this initial conversation, Nel has gone from working in SA to navigating a career change into an adjacent role beyond campus education to facing an involuntary job loss and returning to HE for a role outside of SA.

I met Afreewomxn (AFW) as a graduate student, and she quickly became my mentor. AFW worked in SA for eleven years. She left her last SA role in the Dean of Students office for a tenure-track faculty position, which she held throughout the completion of this study. While Nel pursued a career change outside of campus-based work before returning to HE, AFW underwent the SA practitioner-to-faculty career change. In the first year of her faculty role, AFW wondered if she would eventually need to pursue a career change outside of HE.

In describing herself, AFW shared that she is a scholar-practitioner, family-oriented, student-centered, and passionate about intersectionality and identity development. AFW's dominant identities (e.g., able-bodied, cisgender, and a U.S. citizen with doctoral education) and target identities (i.e., Black Queer Woman) shaped her SA career. When asked what she is trying to achieve, AFW shared that she is trying "to enact agency for [her]self." When asked to reflect on what bothered her the most and, ultimately, drove her career change out of the SA field, AFW recalled that at the height of uncertainty with the COVID-19 pandemic, senior HE administrators were asking SA professionals to return to campus, unlike faculty. When she asked senior

administrators why faculty have a choice in where they work during COVID-19, they told her she also has a choice, "you get to choose to stay or leave [the job]." This lack of care for her Black Queer life, along with tokenization, leadership failure, and inadequate compensation, made AFW feel that SA work limited her agency. Observing this, AFW stated, "I need to get my agency in this life-or-death situation." For AFW, shifting into a faculty career initially represented an agentic move. Yet, in recounting her feelings after her career change, AFW questioned if she was "betraying…and giving up on the [SA] field" she put so "much time into." Initially, she felt shame, but with time, she realized that after spending her career "supporting others," she now had to support herself. The career change did not result in an immediate resolution but opened AFW up to more critical questions about "what [her] calling is," "will anything ever feel right again," and if she should "leave HE altogether." In negotiating whether to pursue a career change beyond campus-based roles, AFW noted, "If I leave altogether, what if it does not work out? I feel trapped." Finally, AFW noted that she was still "healing," feeling "angry," "sad," and battling depression from the institutional betrayal she endured.

The above stories outline the varied motives, challenges, opportunities, and social differences experienced in the context of a career change and provide a glimpse of the pain and possibility that is worthy of further exploration. While Nel initially pursued a career change prior to returning to HE, AFW weighed the possibility of another career change beyond the ivory tower soon after her SA-to-faculty transition. A career change is *a specific type of career transition*. It is commonly defined as any shift to a person's work context and/or content that involves a subjective shift and necessitates different skills, routines, or environments unrelated to their former career progression (Rhodes & Doering, 1983; Feldman, 2002; Ibarra, 2002). Changing one's career is challenging and often an unwanted life experience since such shifts can

drain resources and usher in periods of unemployment, identity crisis, job insecurity, salary cuts, and moves into less familiar contexts and/or desirable positions (Ahn et al., 2017; Feldman & Ng, 2012). A career change can be difficult, but for professionals restricted by exclusionary and unsustainable work norms in SA (Sallee, 2021), like Nel and AFW, it may also be inevitable.

Given that transitions often involve a journey to something unknown (Anderson et al., 2022), it is understandable why Nel and AFW questioned their ability to adjust to a major career change. For Nel and AFW, the career change and its impact will differ based on their identities. The common feature in their experiences is likely change, which requires courage, strategies, connections, and new ways of seeing oneself (Bridges, 2003; Ibarra, 2003). Despite the abundance of SA research about why professionals, like Nel and AFW, leave SA, little is known about how these SA professionals experience career change beyond campus-based work.

In the following sections of this chapter, I overview the problem of limited empirical research on former SA professionals' career changes beyond campus-based work.[1] Next, I outline the research purpose and question. I then describe how I combined an interpretive framework of life course perspectives with a story methodology to answer the research question. I conclude the chapter with the significance of this study and key terms.

Problem Statement

This study addressed the problem of limited empirical research on Student Affairs (SA) professionals' career changes beyond campus-based work. As a profession, SA, along with academic and business affairs, delivers critical operations across higher education (HE) campuses through departments with professionals from an array of educational, cultural, and

[1] Digital, online spaces, such as the Student Affairs Expatriates' Facebook Group, use the term "Student Affairs Expatriate" to refer to professionals who have or intend to leave SA careers. I do not use the term SA expatriate to refer to the storytellers in this study. While the storytellers understood the term, they did not identify with it.

social backgrounds (Long, 2012; Pritchard & McChesney, 2018). Professionals seeking guidance on SA career development and transitions, such as job changes, promotions, institutional shifts, or retirement, can find many articles, books, and chapters (e.g., Holzweiss & Parrott, 2017; Kniess et al., 2019). However, SA offers little to those exploring career changes beyond the SA practitioner-to-faculty transition, despite evidence that SA professionals leave campus-based roles for varying reasons and often seek public scholarship and spaces for reflections on practice to do so (Edwards, 2022; Studdert & Hoffman, 2021). Online spaces, such as the Expatriates of Student Affairs Facebook group with its 27,000-plus members, suggest that there is an audience for such research. While the SA practitioner-to-faculty studies offer vital insights into career changes, not everyone leaving SA pursues a faculty career (Renn, 2004). Though public scholarship fills this gap by focusing on SA career changes beyond campus roles, it tends to overlook how professionals' social identities shape their transition (Davis, 2022).

In a 2023 retention survey of non-faculty higher education (HE) employees, over one-third (38.6%) of the 593 SA respondents indicated that they were very likely or likely to look for new employment opportunities (Bichsel et al., 2023). This included looking at roles outside of HE in a private for-profit company (61.4%) and a non-profit organization (58.1%). Further, younger workers, men, and employees of Color were more likely to look for other employment than older workers, women, and white employees (Bichsel et al., 2023).

Discussions about professionals who depart SA for adjacent or new industries are not novel (Carpenter et al., 1987; Lorden, 1998; Renn, 2004). SA scholars have tried to expand inquiry by acknowledging career paths beyond campus education. In their conceptual piece, Carpenter et al. (1987) considered how "student affairs education and experience can have salutary effects even if an individual opts out or is forced out of the field" (p. 7). Carpenter et al.

(1987) argued that SA professionals secure a wide range of human and managerial relations skills, from understanding finance and budgeting to collaboration, that are potentially transferable to interpersonal roles (e.g., leader, liaison) or informational roles (entrepreneur, negotiator) in business or management. A decade later, Lorden (1998) questioned whether attrition is a crisis unique to SA when career changes are becoming common in the U.S. To disrupt the bleak SA attrition rhetoric, Lorden (1998) asked the field to consider instead: "are those who leave student affairs disappointed with their experiences or simply ready to move on to something else?" (p. 210). Later, Renn (2004) described adjacent paths in "professional and scholarly associations, publishing houses, consulting firms, and test-preparation companies," where "former student affairs administrators have contributed substantially" (p. 176–177). While this SA scholarship recognized career changes beyond campus settings, the insights offered were not informed by any empirical study of former SA professionals' actual career changes. Further, no one has studied former SA professionals' career changes since these early writings.

Additionally, I have observed a tendency among SA scholars, leaders, former SA colleagues, and even myself to treat career change as evidence of SA attrition and/or to perceive the study of career change as a direct conflict with the field's retention efforts. Surrett's (2021, 2024) scholarship has pushed me to consider a different possibility. Building on Lorden's (1998) critique, Surrett argued that attrition is not a problem but a recycled professional myth in SA, pointing to a lack of contemporary evidence. Further, Surrett (2024) added that not every entry-level professional could be retained in the SA profession unless they choose to remain in entry-level roles since opportunities to enter the field outpace promotion opportunities. As such, Surrett (2024) observed, "We do not want and cannot support a 100% retention rate, so what is the goal?" (para 37). For Surrett, the myth of attrition does not mean the SA field should

overlook staff retention and morale issues. At the same time, Surrett urged the field to do more to support SA professionals who seek or face a career change without uncritically conflating such efforts with attrition. Yet, studies of career changes beyond campus roles remain nonexistent.

There are at least two reasons why the limited study of SA professionals' career changes beyond campus roles is problematic. First, career change can be a period of crisis and stress that entails a large investment of time, expense, and effort (Cohen-Scali, 2016; Preoteasa, 2021). Moving into a new career drastically different in context (e.g., leaving a large campus for a small educational non-profit) and/or content (e.g., leaving SA for a human resource path) can result in psychological changes and social, financial, and personal consequences (Feldman, 2002; Ibarra, 2002). The demands of a career change can overwhelm an individual's ability to adapt, especially if the change is involuntary (Brazier et al., 2024). While some can manage this shift, others may struggle based on contextual factors (e.g., work inequities or family roles) that limit a person's coping resources (Tomlinson et al., 2018). Public scholarship suggests leaving higher education careers is associated with intense fear and grief (Eng, 2020; Elue & Simula, 2023). A person may fear remaining stuck in the wrong career, not living up to their potential, and sacrificing personal fulfillment (Ibarra, 2002; Muja & Appelbaum, 2012). Of this, Ibarra (2002) observed, "we worry that the same self who once chose what we no longer want to do might again make a bad choice" (p. 47). During this uncertain period of reinvention, individuals need resources to inform their decision-making, which are lacking in SA.

Second, SA careers do not guarantee secure, sustainable, or lifelong employment and are shaped by external and internal constraints that can drive professionals, including those with multiple target identities, to seek a career change (Sallee, 2021; Williams, 2019; West, 2021). Recent external events, such as the Covid-19 pandemic and anti-DEI (diversity, equity, and

inclusion) U.S. state legislative actions, eliminated SA jobs, mostly held by women, people of Color, and younger and older employees (Bauman, 2021; Hicks, 2024; Krone, 2021). Without employment protections, like tenure, SA professionals are prone to volatility in U.S. higher education, and individuals may be involuntarily forced to look elsewhere with limited empirical insights (e.g., Kuk et al., 2012; West, 2021). Further, prior scholarship has noted that the supply of qualified SA professionals can exceed the field's demand for workers, forcing some to leave HE for employment (Edwards, 2022; Frank, 2013; Surrett, 2021).

Related to the second reason, research suggests that SA career departures and transitions are experienced based on a person's social identities and related oppressive systems (ACPA Presidential Task Force, 2022; Edwards, 2022; Robbins et al., 2019; Walton, 2022). For Robbins et al. (2019), since SA reflects a culture of inequitable and oppressive systems, such as classism, racism, and homophobia, professionals' career transitions can shift the salience of one or more identities in ways that are disaffirming. Relatedly, Stebleton and Buford (2021) observed an elevated workload and stress in SA, particularly for professionals working with Black, Indigenous, and People of Color and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer-identified students or who identify within these communities. Qualitative studies confirm that SA work inequities drive some to leave SA and change careers (Dos, 2021; Williams, 2019; West, 2021). As such, studying career changes with attention to the field's diverse workforce may help SA professionals facing work inequities and disaffirmation seek well-being and agency beyond campus work (Williams, 2019). Next, I briefly contextualize career change.

What is a Career Change?

A career change *is a specific type of* transition studied within career research, which also covers other transitions, such as organizational entry, job loss, job change, and retirement

(Sullivan & Ariss, 2021).[2] In this study, a career change is defined as a change to: (1) the context in which individuals work, such as leaving a large HE campus for a small education non-profit, (2) the content of the work, such as leaving the SA profession one trained for to pursue a new profession, (3) or both, such as leaving a SA campus-based role to work in a human resources role at a non-profit (Rhodes & Doering, 1983; Feldman, 2002; Ibarra, 2002). Most importantly, the individual must subjectively perceive the change as a career change for it to be considered as such (Ibarra, 2002). It is important to note that career change is distinguished from a job change, which is "defined as movement to a similar job or to a job that is part of a normal career path," such as a teacher becoming a principal (Rhodes & Doering, 1983, p. 631).

Additionally, career change can be in/voluntary and these transition characteristics shape "how the person perceives the transition and progresses through it" (Heppner & Scott, 2006, p. 3). Voluntary changes are self-initiated and, for instance, may be driven by a new opportunity, a sense of calling, and values (Ahn et al., 2017; Fouad & Bynner, 2008; Wise & Millward, 2005). An involuntary change can occur due to negative factors, such as layoffs, health issues, burn out, an abusive supervisor, or workplace inequities (Brazier et al., 2024; Masdonati et al., 2017; Sullivan & Ariss, 2021). In this study, I focused on both in/voluntary career changes.

Studying career change is increasingly critical today as the days of working for and retiring from the same organization with a pension are long gone (Wittmer & Rudolph, 2015). Today's workers commonly expect multiple career transitions, including major career changes (Bandow et al., 2007). The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) (2024a) reported that the average number of job changes is 9.1 for men and 9.5 for women ages 18 to 36 with a bachelor's degree and higher. The U.S. BLS also collects data on occupational transfers, which refers to

[2] Career transition research falls under career studies, which began with organization studies and today is interdisciplinary, including fields such as career counseling, adult development, and human resource development.

workers who leave an occupation for employment in a different occupation. For the 2023–33 decade, the U.S. BLS (2024b) projects an annual occupational transfer rate of 4,200 employees among postsecondary education administrators, which underscores career transitions to come.

That career changes have become more prevalent is connected to numerous factors, including shifting values and attitudes related to work and broader structural shifts in technology and global labor markets (Heppner & Scott, 2006). For example, global market shifts from manufacturing jobs and other middle-class well-paying jobs in the Global North, where individuals previously provided loyalty in exchange for lifelong employment security, to off-shoring and the rise of the knowledge economy have left individuals (instead of organizations) increasingly responsible for lifelong employment (McDonald & Hite, 2018; Peake & McDowall, 2012). Some have attributed the rise of a career change to growth in service-based businesses, the adoption of contingent and non-standard employment, and U.S. workers voluntarily seeking out non-traditional paths (e.g., part-time or multiple jobs or entrepreneurship) (Barley et al., 2017; De Vos et al., 2021; Mirvis & Hall, 1994). Others have attributed the rise of career change to a more diverse workforce that is interested in career trajectories that diverge from linear advancement models set forth by white men (Wittmer & Rudolph, 2015).

Research Purpose and Question

To address the need for career change coverage in SA research, this qualitative study explored the career change experiences of former student affairs (SA) professionals who left campus-based work for adjacent or new industries. Additionally, SA research on the practitioner-to-faculty career change and other career transitions suggests individuals experience transitions based on their positionality (e.g., social identities, functional work area, rank, etc.; Perry et al., 2019; Robbins et al., 2019; Wallace & Ford, 2023; West, 2021). However, the public scholarship

on career changes from SA overlooks the role of positionality in the transition. As such, I generated career change stories of five former SA professionals with diverse positionalities.

The following research question framed this study: *How did former student affairs (SA) professionals experience their career change?* Recognizing that SA work inequities and other factors linked to attrition limit a person's quality of life and leave them distraught about their career decisions (West, 2021, 2022; Williams, 2019), I studied career change as one path forward to give individuals, particularly those with target identities, the best chance possible at renewal, joy, safety, and purpose.[3] SA professionals, like Nel, AFW, and even myself, who feel alone, scared, or unsure, and the SA leaders who support them, may draw direction from these stories of reinvention and develop career counseling tools around the insights generated.

Study Approach

To answer the research question, this study combined an interpretive framework of life course perspectives with a story methodology. Below, I briefly outline how the interpretive framework guided this study. I then detail why I employed stories as a methodology to study former SA professionals' career change experiences.

Interpretive Framework

Here, I briefly cover the interpretive framework that guided this study, which is reviewed in greater detail in chapter 4. Though my study purpose has remained the same, I did not initially frame this study with life course perspectives. Instead, I began the study without a framework, allowing my present framing to emerge from my engagement with participants and their stories.

Life course theory, which emerged from sociology, focuses on human development (Elder & Johnson, 2003; Elder et al., 2003; Fehring & Bessant, 2009; Giele & Elder, 1998).

[3] While I drew on the SA attrition literature to identify the antecedents of SA professionals' decisions to change careers, this study was not an attrition-solving study given Surrett's (2021) finding of attrition as a myth in SA.

Three life course principles guided this study. First, the principle of dynamic lives emphasizes ongoing changes in a person's life. This principle helped me see career change as a process of transformation informed by a person's early life and future goals and driven by a subjective or objective turning point in a person's life (Elder et al., 2003). Second, the principles of social contexts and linked lives refer to the various work and home settings in a person's life, which present constraints and resources, sometimes through actors embedded in these relational settings (Fehring & Bessant, 2009). This principle helped me consider the constraints and resources across work, home, and online spaces and their influence on individuals' career change. Third, agency refers to individuals' self-determination in response to external environments and relationships, which helped me consider the individual decisions and actions that shaped the career change (Elder et al., 2003). These principles helped me conceptualize career change as a dynamic process shaped by the interplay between an individual's decisions and external settings (Preoteasa, 2021). Next, I will discuss my use of story as a methodology.

Story Methodology

As noted above, individuals experience career change as a dynamic process, which can mirror the typical arc of a story (Cohen & Mallon, 2001). Given this dynamic process, I employed a narrative-based research approach involving stories to explore former SA professionals' career change experiences. In narrative research, there is a common assertion that individuals live, communicate, and form meaning about their experiences through stories (Clandinin, 2006; McAlpine, 2016). In career studies, Cochran (1990) also pointed out that individuals live, represent, explain, and comprehend careers through their stories. In career contexts, stories are often used by individuals to revise, organize, and make sense of the order of their career (e.g., career stories often have a beginning, middle, and end as individuals seek to

make sense of their past and future from their present; Cohen & Mallon, 2001). I drew inspiration from Cohen and Mallon (2001), who advanced story as a research approach stating its everyday relevance and familiarity across different contexts and audiences. Cohen and Mallon (2001) used "story" to "describe the complex, baggy, sometimes contradictory, often circuitous accounts of their careers that people construct in the course of research conversations" (p. 50). A story approach helped me underscore the idiosyncrasies in former SA professionals' career change experiences. As such, I used stories in this study to generate, analyze, and report findings (also stories) of how former SA professionals experienced their career change.

Significance

This study makes several notable contributions. First, this study provides current student affairs (SA) professionals with empirical information on career changes. Second, for SA professionals presented with new career opportunities, facing work constraints in SA, such as racism and institutional betrayal (e.g., Dos, 2021; Williams, 2019), and those unable to wait for organizational change, this study offers guidance on decision-making. Third, this study offers empirical insights that can guide SA professional associations, supervisors, and graduate programs tasked with guiding professionals' career development (Bender, 1980; Holmes, 1982; Kortegast & Hamrick, 2009). Finally, this study helps to expand career research in the SA field by centering career changes beyond campus-based roles. Next, I outline the key study terms.

Key Terms

Below are key definitions that reappear throughout this dissertation and are critical for understanding this study of former SA professionals' career changes:

- **Career:** De Vos et al. (2021) defined career "as the sequence of work experiences that evolve over the individual's life course (Arthur et al., 1989), and refers to the movement of a person through time and space" (p. 1).
- **Career Transition:** According to Louis (1980), career transitions refer to a period in which a person shifts objective roles or a subjective orientation towards how they feel about a role they previously held. Examples of career transitions apart from a career change include a job change, organizational change, and retirement (Feldman, 2002).
- **Career Change:** In this study, a career change is defined as a change to: (1) the context in which an individual works, such as leaving a large HE campus for a small education non-profit, (2) the content of the work, such as leaving the SA profession one trained for to pursue a new profession, (3) or both, such as leaving a SA campus-based role to work in a human resources at a non-profit (Rhodes & Doering, 1983; Feldman, 2002; Ibarra, 2002). Most importantly, the individual must subjectively perceive the change(s) as a career change for it to be considered as such (Ibarra, 2002).
- **Dominant Identities**: Dominant identities refer to categories of race, ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, age, ability, and other markers used in the U.S. to systematically advantage individuals from groups seen as the dominant norm (Tatum, 2000). In the U.S., the norm is often "white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, Christian, and financially secure" (Audre Lorde as cited in Tatum, 2000, p. 11).

- **Job Change:** Job change refers to a distinct career transition separate from a career change. Rhodes and Doering (1983) defined job change as a "movement to a similar job or to a job that is part of a normal career path" (p. 631).
- **Involuntary Change:** Involuntary change refers to a transition caused by unwanted and negative factors, like layoffs or a discriminatory work climate (Fouad & Bynner, 2008).
- **Student Affairs:** As faculty roles became professionalized and driven by research, higher education (HE) student personnel increasingly focused on student outcomes (Pritchard & McChesney, 2018). The 1937 Student Personnel Point of View report outlined institutional steps for developing students' whole experience (e.g., spirit, morals, and intellect), establishing the field of student affairs (SA) (Roberts, 2012). The student affairs field serves to connect the work of HE to the development of students (Pritchard & McChesney, 2018; Roberts, 2012). Today, along with academic and business affairs, student affairs deliver critical university operations across diverse units (e.g., student conduct; student counselling; multicultural education, etc.). According to Long (2012), "Student affairs is a large, complex area of campus operations and is comprised of many departments with professionals from a wide variety of educational backgrounds" (p. 1). There are at least 36 SA positions in the field, split between leadership roles (e.g., Dean of Students; Head of Women's Center) and frontline/student-facing roles (e.g., student conduct and health coordinators) (Pritchard & McChesney, 2018).
- **Adjacent Career(s):** Adjacent careers refer to work in the broader "higher education industry" (Renn, 2004, p. 177) that aids the mission of physical HE

campuses in a third-party capacity, such as entrepreneurial, for-profit, or non-profit service providers (e.g., D2L). While this career path may share some similarities with campus-based SAHE work, it can also include major differences in work context, content, and perceptions. It is not uncommon for SAHE colleagues to treat individuals in adjacent careers differently and for former SA professionals in SAHE-aligned paths to report differences, such as corporate pressures (Scheibler, 2017; Smith, 2020; Studdert & Hoffman, 2022).

- **Student Affairs Expatriates:** The term "Student Affairs Expatriates" stems from the grassroots social media efforts of former SA leaders and colleagues within a private online Facebook community that has created resources and career opportunities for those who have or are seeking to leave the SA field. While the storytellers and I discussed the importance of the SA expatriates' term, none of the storytellers in this study used the term to refer to themselves in relation to their career change.
- **Target Identities:** Target identities refer to "categories of 'otherness'" (i.e., race, age, ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, ability, etc.) used to systematically disadvantage individuals in U.S. society (Tatum, 2000, p. 10). Often, otherness refers to those who fall outside of a "white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, Christian, and financially secure" norm (Audre Lorde as cited in Tatum, 2000, p. 11).
- **Transition:** A transition is an event or non-event that shifts an individual's assumptions about oneself and the world over time, leading to changes in one's roles, behaviors, routines, and relationships (Anderson et al., 2022).

- **Voluntary Change:** Voluntary change refers to a self-initiated career transition that can occur for various reasons, such as a sense of calling (Ahn et al., 2017).

Dissertation Overview

In this dissertation, I argue that former SA professionals experienced career change based on the interaction between their early lives and career turning points, external settings and actors, and individual decisions, reflecting their diverse positionalities. In the following chapters of this dissertation, I focus on the career change experiences of former SA professionals. In Chapter 2, I contextualize this study with the literature on: 1) career change, 2) student affairs attrition, and 3) student affairs career changes (i.e., SA-to-faculty transitions and transitions to new and adjacent industries). In Chapter 3, I offer a detailed overview of my positionality, epistemology, story-based methodology, and research design, which details how the five storytellers were chosen and introduces readers to each one. Following an overview of the study design, Chapter 4 introduces readers to my restorying analysis, including a more detailed description of the life course framework that emerged from and informed my analysis and interpretation of the stories. Chapters 5 through 9 contain my findings, which are presented in the context of each storyteller's career change story. Finally, Chapter 10 discusses the answers to the research question by synthesizing Chapters 5 through 9 findings for common themes and takeaways, study contributions, implications for research and practice, and conclusion.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I reviewed literature to contextualize the research question, focusing on the (un)known aspects of former student affairs (SA) professionals' career change experiences. I approached this literature review from a humanistic creative inquiry lens. Montuori (2005) explained that a creative approach invites doctoral researchers to engage in relationality with the community of ancestors shaping their inquiry. Grounded in a creative inquiry lens, my literature review search method was not meant to be exhaustive but "selective, highlighting some areas at the expense of others" (Montouri, 2005, p. 376). My efforts to select, include, and exclude literature via key words, such as student affairs (AND attrition, turnover, career change, or career transitions), represent my explicit literature search criteria. I first reviewed initial articles, SA professional association briefs, and reflections on practice before executing multiple searches across databases (including MSU Libraries, Google Scholar, ERIC) and news outlets (Chronicle of Higher Education and Inside HigherEd), identifying critical primary sources and engaging in forward and backward citation mapping to locate additional materials. I determined saturation when primary sources and their findings and arguments became repetitive in each new source.

My initial search for empirical studies of former SA professionals' career change led me to SA attrition solving studies, which primarily explore why professionals leave SA to improve retention. Widening my search, I found another body of scholarship on how SA professionals experienced career changes to faculty careers in higher education (HE). Yet, these studies left out career changes from SA to new or adjacent industries. Why has there been so little study of how individuals experience a career change from SA in the studies I was reading, especially since studies of actual departures and intentions to leave suggest many seek careers beyond campuses?

The limited study of career change in SA led me to public scholarship and career studies. Public scholarship by former SA professionals about their career change, found in blogs, news journalism, and podcasts, accounted for the perspectives left out of the peer-reviewed SA literature. Finally, I read the career studies scholarship, a vast interdisciplinary field covering different career topics, such as career change (Moore et al., 2007).

Overall, I found existing studies covered *what* rates people left or intend to leave SA, *who* left, *why* they left, and even *where* they went but are largely without any explanation of *how* a career change is experienced beyond campus-based roles, hence limited in scope. To make this argument, I organized the literature review into four sections. First, I drew on career change studies outside of SA to establish a broader context for evaluating SA career scholarship. In the second section, I covered the *what*, *who*, *why*, and *where* of SA professionals' career changes beyond college education. In the final section, I introduced literature on the SA administrator-to-faculty career change followed by public scholarship from former SA professionals who left campus-based roles to establish insights on individuals' transition experiences. Finally, I concluded with implications for studying the career changes of former SA professionals who left campus-based roles, outlining gaps and opportunities in existing SA career research.

Career Change Scholarship

In this section, I covered career change scholarship. This section is not the conceptual framework for this study but instead established the broader context of career change research I used to evaluate SA career change and transition scholarship. Career change is *a type* of career transition studied in career studies, established by organization studies in the mid-1970s (Moore et al., 2007), and now includes various disciplines, theories, models, and topics. Here, I briefly reviewed the questions addressed in career change studies. Then, I distinguished change and

transition as each offer distinct insights for studying career changes. Finally, I outlined common methodologies used for studying career changes.

Career Change

Career change is defined as any shift to a person's work context, content, and/or perception that necessitates different roles, skills, routines, environments, or sensemaking unrelated to their former role and career progression (Carless & Arnup, 2011; Feldman, 2002; Ibarra, 2002; Murtagh et al., 2011; Rhodes & Doering, 1983). Career changes can be voluntary (e.g., individuals choose to shift occupations) or involuntary (e.g., termination) (Brazier et al., 2024; Muja & Appelbaum, 2012). Although other career transition concepts (e.g., job change, organization change, turnover, and retirement) are conceptually similar, a career change is distinct because it drastically shifts a person's work context (e.g., jumping from a large corporation to a non-profit), content (e.g., leaving behind prior occupational knowledge), and/or perception (e.g., a person's subjective belief that their transition is not typical) Feldman, 2002; Ibarra, 2003). Though associated with early years of employment, a career change can occur throughout the lifespan (Brown, 2000; Wise & Millward, 2005).

The common questions asked in career change studies include (Ahn et al., 2017; Carless & Arnup, 2011; Castro et al., 2020; Cohen-Scali, 2016; Feldman, 2002; Hidegh & Szabó, 2011; Khapova et al., 2007; Masdonati et al., 2017; McMahon & Patton, 2018; Murtagh et al., 2011; Nalis et al., 2021; Preoteasa, 2021; Supapidhayakul & Simpson, 1987; Tsuda-McCaie & Kotera, 2021): (1) What are the main inputs of a career change decision (e.g., predictors/reasons)? (2) How do individuals experience a career change (e.g., process, resources, obstacles, strategies, sense of calling, emotions, stories, and meaning-making)? (3) What are the outputs of a career change (e.g., consequences, predictors of performance, outcomes, satisfaction, etc.)?

Distinguishing Change and Transition

A career change *is a type of* career transition (Sullivan & Ariss, 2021). An important difference between change and transition that warrants attention is that "Change is situational…Transition, on the other hand, is psychological" (Bridges, 2003, p. 3). Whereas change is external and outcome-driven, a psychological transition is internal (Bridges, 2003). Bridges (2003) identified a three-part model to capture the psychological shift that follows the process of change: (1) transitions start with an ending and letting go, (2) they are followed by a neutral zone between the past and future reality, and (3) end with a new beginning. While a career change involves an external outcome (e.g., new job), as *a type* of career transition, a career change also involves an internal process (e.g., a new role or identity) (Ibarra, 2004).

Similarly, Ibarra's (2002, 2003) empirical study suggests that career change involves an internal (transition) and external (change) dimension. Ibarra (2002) explained, "who we are and what we do are tightly connected…to change that connection, we must also resort to action" (p. 42). Ibarra (2002) found that actual career change is difficult even when time is invested in reinventing oneself because most follow conventional wisdom, which says individuals must take up an adaptive (internal) approach to a career change (e.g., plan, know thyself, consult advisers, think big; Ebberwein et al., 2004). Yet, Ibarra's research found that successful career change happens in the opposite direction, wherein a person tests new interests, values, and goals first and learns by doing (external/situational change), which eventually leads to an internal change (e.g., forming a new working identity).

Approaches to Studying Career Change

Career change studies adopt various approaches, which have a shared focus on the interconnection between individuals, as career changers, organizations, as in for-profit

employers, and environments, as in the labor market, in shaping a person's transition (Brazier et al., 2024; Carless & Arnup, 2011; Castro et al., 2020; Khapova et al., 2007; Nalis et al., 2021; Muja & Appelbaum, 2012; Zemon, 2002). Carless and Arnup's (2011) longitudinal survey study of career change antecedents and outcomes found that individual factors, such as openness to experience, extraversion, gender, age, educational level, and occupation tenure, and one organizational factor, job security, related to career change. Castro et al.'s (2020) qualitative study with 28 early and mid-career STEM researchers from elite universities found that a data science bootcamp, an external career catalyst, facilitated researchers' change into industry roles.

Further, scholars treat individuals' career changes as a dynamic process unfolding across time (Cohen-Scali, 2016; Howes & Goodman-Delahunty, 2011). Cohen-Scali (2017) reported the thematic findings in their study of former union officers' career changes based on the chronology of participants' transition. This chronology involved leaving union employment, undertaking transition activities, and forming new professional expectations.

Scholars also employ psychological lenses to study career change (Muja & Appelbaum, 2012: Murtagh et al., 2011; Wise & Millward, 2005). Muja and Appelbaum (2012) found that complex rational and emotional thoughts are involved in the planning of voluntary career change. Murtagh et al.'s (2011) study of eight women's career changes found that other-than-rational processes involving emotion and self-regulation shaped career decision making.

Still, others have positioned career change as a meaning-making process involving a sense of calling, subjective beliefs, and stories (Ahn et al., 2017; Hidegh & Szabó, 2011; Ibarra, 2003; McMahon et al., 2018; Tsuda-McCaie & Kotera, 2021). In this sense, Ahn et al. (2017) found that career changes were motivated by a sense of calling, which emerged from individuals' self-exploration and meaning-making. Similarly, Ibarra (2003) found that career changers

"devote considerable energy to developing" the "story that links the old and new self" for "an external audience to whom [they] are selling [their career] reinvention" (p. 156).

Finally, scholars employ multiple lenses in their career change studies (Hoyer & Steyaert, 2014; Preoteasa, 2021). Preoteasa (2021) used life course theory to study career change. Preoteasa (2021) combined a dynamic understanding of the career change process with the stories individuals constructed about their career change experience. These studies highlight the variety of dynamic, individual, and environmental factors shaping career changes. The next section drew on SA attrition-solving studies, which, though limited, offer insights into the *what*, *who*, *why*, and *where* of career changes among professionals who have or seek to leave SA.

Leaving the Student Affairs Profession: The What, Who, Why, and Where

The organization of this section mirrors Brown and Trudell's (2019) special issue chapter from Kniess et al.'s (2019) edited book *Managing Career Transitions Across the Lifespan for the Student Affairs Practitioner*. Brown and Trudell's chapter is the only peer-reviewed scholarship to detail why SA professionals pursue careers outside campus roles, the types of positions that exist, how to initiate a search, strategies for transitioning, and navigating a new work culture adjacent to or different from higher education (HE). I added to Brown and Trudell's schema of "why and what" by expanding on the "who and where" of SA career change from the SA attrition literature. Although Surrett (2021, 2024) argued that SA attrition is a professional myth, I still used the attrition literature to establish SA professionals' pre-transition realities (i.e., the antecedents that contribute to their decisions to leave SA) and where they go after leaving SA.

What "Attrition Rates" and "Intentions to Leave" Tell Us about Career Change

Following Bender's (1980) study of professional burnout in SA, scholars defined SA attrition by examining departure rates (Burns, 1982; Holmes et al., 1983; Wood et al., 1985). SA

attrition rates have been reported to range from 20% to 61% (Holmes et al., 1983; Richmond & Sherman, 1991; Wood et al., 1985). Holmes et al. (1983) reported retention levels at different years in the profession, finding that nearly 61% of the respondents with more than five years of experience were no longer in the field, a period commonly associated with new professionals.

Despite a lack of recent attrition evidence, researchers still cite attrition rates from the 1980s to justify attrition solving studies (Surrett, 2021, 2024), such as inquiries into actual departures (e.g., Buchanan & Shupp, 2015; Marshall et al., 2016; Nyunt et al., 2024). Marshall et al.'s (2016) mixed-methods study found that 60% of the 153 respondents who left SA initially felt they would stay in the field for their entire career when they were new professionals. Marshall et al.'s study of actual departures suggests that career decisions can shift over time, leading individuals to leave SA despite initial intentions for a long-term SA career. Marshall et al. also found that while most leave the SA field in their first five years (45%), departures unfold across time and professional levels, with 11% leaving in Years 6 or 7, 22% leaving the field in years 8–10, and 22% leaving after 11 years or more in SA.

While some study actual departures, others examine intent to leave, seen as a reliable indicator of future attrition per theories of organizational turnover and job satisfaction (Rosser & Javinar, 2003; Silver & Jackeman, 2014). In earlier studies, only 20.2% (Holmes et al., 1983) to 36% (Bender, 1980) of professionals intended to work in SA for their entire career. Recent studies are contradictory, with some findings reporting rates as low as 11% (Miles, 2013) and others reporting evidence that rates have remained unchanged since the 1980s (Naifeh & Kearney, 2021). A recent survey with 957 respondents found that 94 (10%) and 278 (29%) respondents reported 'no' or 'don't know' respectively when asked, "Do you plan to continue

working in student affairs for the next 5 years?" (NASPA, 2022, p. 59). In a separate survey of new professionals (n = 191), 45.5% intended to leave SA before 16 years (Lee & Karbley, 2021).

Scholars have interpreted attrition rates in some common ways. Most have pointed to attrition costs to individuals, the profession, and HE institutions, such as threats to student success (Marshall et al., 2016; Mullen et al., 2018; Rosser & Javinar, 2003; Sallee, 2021). Others have argued that attrition is a natural extension of the current U.S. mobility culture that may not stem from individual dissatisfaction but from attractive career opportunities (Carpenter et al., 1987; Frank, 2013; Jo, 2008; Lorden, 1998; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008). Moreover, Frank's (2013) dissertation specified the benefits of SA employee attrition to HE organizations, such as the ability to shift workplace culture and promote those who remain.

Notably, a more critical interpretation asserts that the SA profession has incorrectly defined its attrition problem by relying on outdated and scant evidence (Buchanan & Shupp, 2016; Evans, 1988; Lorden, 1998; Surrett, 2021). Surrett's (2021) dissertation implicated at least 17 SA studies for perpetuating a professional mythology of attrition by relying on inaccurate secondary citations and outdated data gathered over 40 years ago. Unlike the SA attrition solving literature, Surrett (2021) used a labor market logic of supply and demand to situate attrition as unproblematic, explaining that unlike other professions, such as nursing, teaching, and social work, the supply of qualified job seekers in SA rarely dips below hiring demands. Further, an obvious gap with attrition studies examining intentions to leave is that anticipated departure from SA does little to tell us of actual behavior (Evans, 1988).

A final implicit and less discussed interpretation central to this study is that intentions to leave and departures imply the possibility of career transitions among SA practitioners, such as a career change or workforce departure. While the field has poorly defined the attrition rate and

problem (Surrett, 2021), countless articles, chapters, and online testimonials of those who have departed SA suggest that professionals do undergo a career change (e.g., Brown & Trudell, 2019). In this respect, Lorden (1998) sought to expand SA inquiry with a question that remains unanswered, asking, "[A]re those who leave student affairs disappointed with their experiences or simply ready to move on to something else?" (p. 210). Lorden (1998) also added that "those who leave the field do so with a valuable set of skills and experiences" (p. 211). Yet, apart from citing Carpenter et al.'s (1981) conceptual article on transferable SA skills, Lorden's (1998) insights about career change are not rooted in any empirical study of those who do leave.

Who Leaves Student Affairs

Professionals from varying career levels, social identity groups, and functional areas have or intend to leave the field (Lee & Karbley, 2021; Kuk et al., 2012; Perry et al., 2019; Wallace & Ford, 2023). Earlier evidence suggested that younger workers, who typically occupy lower professional levels and are more likely to be mobile, and women workers, specifically those who are young mothers, tend to leave the field at more significant levels (Anthony, 2016; Anderson et al., 2000; Bender, 1980; Burns, 1982; Evans, 1998; Holmes et al., 1983; Lee & Karbley, 2021; Richmond & Sherman, 1991; Howard-Hamilton, 1998; Miles, 2013). As noted earlier, based on data from the 1980s, attrition is believed to be high in the first five to six years in SA, often associated with entry-level professionals. With women making up most early-to-midlevel SA professionals, women from the lower levels of SA may be overrepresented among those leaving the profession (Sallee et al., 2021). Further, Bender's (1980) quantitative questionnaire study with 145 participants found that biological age shaped whether individuals planned to stay in the field long-term, with 31% of the participants between the ages of 23–36 (n = 95) reporting they do not intend to stay in the field compared to only 12% of those in the 36+ age group (n = 50).

Of course, practitioners are also known to depart SA from senior-level positions after 20-plus years in the field (Davis, 2022; Fienman, 2004; Lancaster, 2005; Kuk et al., 2012).

More recent evidence both confirms and complicates previous trends. Recent reports of employee retention among non-faculty HE employees, which also surveyed SA professionals, suggests that younger workers, men, and employees of Color intended to look for employment outside of campus education than older workers, women, and white employees (Bichsel et al., 2022, 2023). Indeed, in addition to mothers who leave, fathers and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) parents in student affairs who desire to be engaged caregivers may also leave the field (Kortegast, 2021; Marshall et al., 2016; Sallee et al., 2021). Further, LGBTQ individuals without children and individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are known to weigh leaving SA (Ardoin, 2021; Kortegast, 2021).

Based on the race and ethnicity demographics reported in attrition-solving scholarship, professionals from all races and ethnicities appear to leave SA (Bichsel et al., 2022, 2023; Dos, 2021; Guillaume et al., 2020; Lee & Karbley, 2021; Perry et al., 2019). Interestingly, I did not find studies that specifically examined whether certain racial and ethnic groups experience attrition at disproportionately higher rates, pointing to the SA field's recent failure to verify if attrition is a problem (Surrett, 2021). Still, scholars have focused on the attrition experiences of Men and Women of Color to promote the retention of a diverse workforce in SA (Boss & Bravo, 2021; Dos, 2021; Wallace & Ford, 2023; West, 2021; Williams, 2019). From the available scholarship, professionals from marginalized cultural groups may leave SA for reasons that differ from their white, older, and heterosexual counterparts, which the next section details.

Why: The Person- and Context-Related Factors Driving Attrition

Concerned about SA attrition rates, scholars shifted to explore its causes, studying why people intend to or have left SA (Marshall et al., 2016). This scholarship depicts attrition as an interplay between person-related and contextual factors, which I synthesize in this section. Focusing on person- and context-related factors aligns with career theories like person-environment fit, emphasizing the interplay of individual agency and external contexts in shaping career paths (Feldman & Ng, 2012; Tomlinson et al., 2018). This section outlines reasons individuals withdraw from the SA field, providing only a partial picture of individuals' career change experiences. This is because SA attrition studies often focus on factors that push individuals to leave or opt out of SA, which may not fully explain why individuals choose a particular new career or the factors that pull them into new opportunities (Ibarra, 2006).

Person-Related Factors

To examine the causes of SA attrition, scholars study person-related attrition factors through a variety of psycho-social measures, such as quality of work-life, job satisfaction, burnout, wellness, morale, motivation, and perceived support (Frank, 2013; Johnsrud et al., 2000; Rosser & Javinar, 2003; Tull, 2006; Mullen et al., 2018; Naifeh & Kearney, 2021). This research shows that SA professionals, who have or intend to leave the field, report a combination of poor work quality, high levels of job dissatisfaction and burnout, lack of recognition, low morale, lack of advancement, job insecurity, lack of motivation, and lack of workplace support. Some scholars attribute these trends to differences in professionals' values and perceptions of SA work (Burns, 1982; Marshall et al., 2016; NASPA, 2022; Silver & Jakeman, 2014; Wood et al., 1985). Majority of scholars attribute these trends to an individual's professional level, social identities (e.g., race, gender, age, educational level, relationship status, etc.), duration in the field,

levels of responsibility, support staff supervised, and even vacation days taken (Bender, 1980; Evans, 1988; Frank, 2013, Holmes et al., 1983; Howard-Hamilton et al., 1998; Kortegast & Hamrick, 2009; Lorden, 1998; Marshall et al., 2016; Miles, 2013; Nuss & Schroeder, 2002; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008; Silver & Jakeman, 2014; Tull, 2006). For example, Anderson's (1998) survey design dissertation study found differences in job satisfaction based on age, relationship status, and gender. The study reported that men senior student affairs officers (SSAOs) were more satisfied than women SSAOs, older SSAOs were more satisfied than younger SSAOs, and married SSAOs were more satisfied than unmarried SSAOs. While psycho-social approaches illuminate employees' attitudes, they can overlook the impact of professional, life, and social contexts, including the pressures and catalysts they pose for SA practitioners' careers.

Context-Related Factors

SA attrition is not limited to individual factors (ACPA, 2022; Anthony, 2016; Isdell & Wolf-Wendel, 2021). Attrition is also driven by contextual factors related to the SA profession, personal life, and socio-economic conditions (e.g., West, 2021). This section details how multiple contextual factors may shape the career decisions of individuals who leave SA.

The Student Affairs Profession. The SA profession's structural work issues, cultural norms, and inequities drive its attrition. The structural work issues of SA, such as shorter career ladders, limited positions, lack of supervisor support, credentialism, limited paths to advancement, departure of close colleagues, negative relationship between workload and compensation, and decreased job security, push SA practitioners to exit the field (Anderson et al., 2000; Biddex et al., 2012; Bluestone, 2022; Carpenter et al., 1987; Evans, 1988; Edwards, 2022; Holmes, 1982; Howard-Hamilton et al., 1998; Lorden 1995, 1998; McCloud & Messmore, 2023; Tull, 2006). The profession's valuing of linear and successive notions of career success

despite its shorter career ladders, for example, challenges professional retention (Lorden, 1995; Marshall et al., 2016). Instead, scholars promote non-traditional lateral and functional role changes (Holmes et al., 1983; Lorden, 1998; Renn, 2004). While one key to retention, such solutions also reveal a core assumption of the profession: practitioners will find the expected pathway of lifelong employment in SA desirable and it will be available to them (Carpenter et al., 1987). Instead, some note that time in the profession can clarify and change individuals' career goals, especially for the young individuals who enter SA directly after college, a stage of adult development marked by identity and career exploration (Brown & Trudell, 2019; Bender, 1980; Lancaster, 2005; Lorden, 1998). In contrast, for SA professionals who did desire lifelong employment, other structural issues, like limited job prospects, unsuccessful job searches, and employment termination driven by performance concerns or organizational restructuring, pushed individuals out (Edwards, 2022; Eng, 2020; Frank, 2013; West, 2021). Terminations grew during Covid-19 as SA divisions cut positions, shrinking available jobs (McClure et al., 2023; Sallee & McKinnon-Crowley, 2022). With decreasing budgets and anticipation of an enrollment cliff set to start in 2026, uncertainty about a lifelong career path in SA may grow (NASPA, 2022).

Furthermore, SA perpetuates cultural work norms that take a toll on professionals (ACPA, 2022; Sallee, 2016, 2021). Sallee (2021) covered how the profession relies on workers giving all their time to work at the exclusion of personal lives and well-being, referred to as ideal worker norms (Acker, 1990). In SA, the ideal worker reflects the work ideals of white, heterosexual, non-disabled, young, single, middle- or upper-class, and cis-gender men (Sallee, 2021). In a feminized field like SA, where women constitute the majority, Sallee (2021) observed that the ideal worker is not a white man but instead a white woman or Woman of Color perceived as "easier to control and profit from" (p. 6) and, in turn, will "not challenge the norms

of the field" (p. 7). The ideal worker can also include individuals who are from poor and working-class backgrounds, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ), professionals of Color, new professionals, and parents (Ardoin, 2021; Boss & Bravo, 2021; Kortegast, 2021; Sallee et al., 2021).

Ultimately, the unending work hours, fast work pace, and neglect of well-being expected of ideal workers push people out of SA (Anderson et al., 2000; Evans, 1988; Lorden, 1995; Marshall et al., 2016; Sallee & McKinnon-Crowley, 2024). Covid-19 is a recent example of pushout related to ideal worker norms (Walton, 2022). SA divisions expected professionals to risk "the health and safety of themselves and their loved ones—for work" (Krone, 2021, para 6). This lack of psychological and physical safety forced many to look for supportive career contexts outside of SA and act out of preservation to ensure their well-being (ACPA, 2022; Elue & Simula, 2023). Although some SA leaders explained away increasing attrition, pointing to the Great Resignation trend across industries, Krone (2021) argued that practitioners were specifically leaving SA due to the profession's enduring demand for people to be "unhealthy," "overeducated, overworked, underpaid, undervalued, and unable to advance" (para 65).

Additional critical scholarship also points to the profession's systemic inequities to explain the attrition of practitioners with minoritized identities (McClure et al., 2023; Olson et al., 2022; Williams, 2019; West, 2021). According to this identity-conscious scholarship, Men and Women of Color and LGBTQ+ individuals encounter similar challenges as their majoritarian counterparts regarding burnout, excessive weekend and evening commitments, work-life conflict, and supervision struggles (Boss & Bravos, 2021; Dos, 2021; Kortegast, 2021). However, this scholarship also shows how individuals from multiple marginalized cultural groups contend with workplace inequities stemming from historical legacies of racism,

heterosexism, and colonialism, among other isms, pushing them to leave or opt out of the field (Cho & Brassfield, 2022; Williams, 2019; West, 2021). Walton (2022), for instance, noted that while many SA professionals were grappling with work exhaustion and despair from a pandemic and national insurrection, professionals of color were also dealing with anti-Black state violence and Asian-American Pacific Islander hate, concerns largely unrecognized by SA leaders. Similarly, Williams' (2019) dissertation study found that Black women faced tokenization, misogynoir practices, lower pay compared to white colleagues, and physical and emotional harm in SA workplaces. Even more, SA leaders depicted Black women's decisions to opt out of SA due to the field's push factors as a personal failure versus a result of an "imperialist, white supremacist, capitalist patriarchy system that demands Black women place themselves last" (Williams, 2019, p. 232). In comparison, an involuntary job termination pushed West (2021) out of SA. Using a Black feminist analysis, West (2021) explained that Black women in SA face a unique confluence of racism, sexism, and marginalization as staff lacking the job security of tenured faculty, which raises their risk of career stagnation and termination.

The role of SA workplace inequities in employee attrition also impacts other individuals from marginalized social groups. Olson et al. (2022) detailed the dissonance one of the co-authors felt between his pre-professional SA experiences, which helped him embrace his sexuality as a white gay man in college, and his work later in SA, which forced him to prioritize neoliberal student outcomes instead of teaching students about social change. This discrepancy eventually pushed him to leave SA (Olson et al., 2022). Finally, professionals can face increased barriers to remaining in SA based on other aspects of their positionality, such as professional rank and functional area (ACPA, 2022, Anderson, 2022). For instance, Wallace and Ford (2023) faced white supremacy as Black men working in entry-level roles in multicultural student affairs

offices, a functional area often marginalized by university leaders and divisions of student affairs. This treatment is because multicultural student affairs offices often work in opposition to institutions "for policies and practices that [make] space for SOC, queer and trans students, students of various faith traditions, students from low-income backgrounds, student veterans, and those at the intersection of these identities" (Wallace & Ford, 2023, p. 7).

In contrast to the above explanations, Surrett (2021) argued that SA attrition problem stems from a myth. Surrett traced how misguided interpretations of early attrition studies from the 1980s led to a professional myth of attrition as a problem, which now acts as a socializing experience, leading individuals to believe departure is "inevitable and demoralizing" (p. 46). Guided by turnover contagion theory, Surrett's survey study found a statistically positive correlation (p <0.001) between attrition thinking, low job satisfaction, and high turnover ideation when controlled for race and gender identities. Given this correlation, Surrett (2021) encouraged the SA field to cease attrition as a problem thinking as it may inadvertently worsen attrition and instead think of staff departure as "a natural part of the employment cycle" (p. 123).

Life Characteristics. Features of an individual's personal life, its demands, transitions, and actors, can also pull individuals out of the SA field (Anthony, 2016; Bailey, 2011; Collins, 2009; Fochtman, 2010; Isdell & Wolf-Wendel, 2021; Jo, 2008; Marshall et al., 2016; Nobbe & Manning, 1997; Spangler, 2011; Stebleton & Buford, 2021; Ting & Watt, 1999). As individuals undergo adult development and new life stage transitions, like marriage, parenthood, and relocations, the ongoing task of integrating work and life domains intensifies, given the ideal worker norms that abound in SA (Sallee, 2021). While some manage to perform as ideal workers in the early stages of their careers and life, when there are typically fewer relational, familial, and caretaking commitments, transitions into different adult milestones can shift interests and

priorities (Anthony, 2016; Edwards, 2022; Kortegast, 2021). In a personal reflection on a painful and unwanted exit from SA, Anthony (2016) detailed the challenge of keeping up with SA demands while undergoing simultaneous life transitions into first-time parenthood and eldercare for a dying and surviving parent. Indeed Renn (2004) noted, "professionals do not always control career trajectories" (p. 178) and "reasons, including disabling injury or illness" "could result in involuntary departure from a planned career track" (p. 179).

Additional life factors, like dual-career partnerships and relocations, forced SA practitioners to opt out of the field (Edwards, 2022; Frank, 2013). In a *Student Affairs Now* podcast interview on career changes, guest Eric Matta attributed his exit from SA to a dual-career transition. When his wife accepted a new job and relocated to a new city with a smaller SA job market, he struggled to secure a SA job (Edwards, 2022). Similarly, in Frank's (2013) dissertation study, practitioners who moved for their partner's careers and others who relocated to be closer to home were pushed out of the field after exhausting the SA job search "because they need[ed] a job—any job" (p. 100). In such cases, "leaving the profession is a last resort" (Frank, 2013, p. 100). Finally, life factors contributing to attrition can extend beyond caretaking and family. LGBTQ individuals, who are less likely to be parents compared to heterosexual individuals, may leave for other reasons, like cost-of-living outpacing wages (Kortegast, 2021).

Socio-Economic Conditions. There is scant peer-reviewed scholarship on how social, historical, and economic contexts shape SA professionals' careers. Based on the available literature, opportunities in other career contexts, such as increased salary, flexible schedules, remote work options, and opportunities for advancement, can motivate practitioners to leave SA (Bichsel et al., 2022; ACPA, 2022; Marshall et al., 2016). Further, social contexts may also facilitate attrition and change (Ibarra, 2006). For instance, Frank (2013) found that some

practitioners were recruited by companies they had worked with while in SA. One participant stated, “I had, in no way, intended or was considering leaving until I was ‘headhunted’ for the lack of a better phrase” (Frank, 2013, p. 56). Finally, broader historical contexts, like the Great Recession or Covid-19, can facilitate career reinvention. For Stebleton and Buford (2021), the Great Recession disrupted the traditional model of career loyalty between SA organizations and employees, pushing them and other SA millennials to be ready for alternative paths if needed.

Where: Career Opportunities Beyond Campus-Based Paths

Beyond pursuing other campus-based paths (e.g., doctoral education, faculty, academic affairs, admissions, etc.) or retiring (Kniess, 2019; Kuk et al., 2012; Patterson, 2019), SA practitioners leave campus-based roles for at least three career changes according to the public scholarship. For this study, I am specifically interested in the first two career changes, which include transitions to SAHE (student affairs and higher education)-adjacent *and* new contexts altogether. First, individuals transition into adjacent or aligned employment within the “higher education industry” (Renn, 2004, p. 176), particularly private organizations (e.g., Campus Labs or Guidebook), non-profit organizations (e.g., national fraternities and sororities or SA associations), governmental agencies (e.g., HE public policy divisions), or self-employment (e.g., educational consulting, entrepreneurship, or freelance) (Brown & Trudell, 2019; NASPA, 2022). Scheibler (2017) explained that SAHE-aligned careers “support the mission of physical institutions and seek to serve students but do so in the capacity of a third party” (p. 52).

Second, individuals may leave SAHE altogether (Bichsel et al., 2022; Brown & Trudell, 2019; Eng, 2020; Frank, 2013; Hancock, 1988; Kuk et al., 2012; Nuss & Schroeder, 2002; Renn, 2004). Responding to Eng’s (2020) Facebook survey, 29 former practitioners shared the industries they pursued after departing SA. These individuals transitioned into educational

technology, radio broadcasting, non-profit management, project management, K–12 education, property management, consulting, online learning, youth development, healthcare administration, law enforcement, human resources, event planning, marketing, and public outreach. Third, individuals may pursue itinerant paths, exiting the workforce briefly or entirely, taking up temporary work until they figure out their next steps, leaving and later returning to SA, and/or doing unpaid work of home or community (Anthony, 2016; Edwards, 2022; NASPA, 2022; Perry et al., 2020; Ostroth & Efird, 1984; Renn, 2004; Williams, 2019).

Recent survey results underscore the above three career paths. NASPA's (2022) survey found that of the 94 participants who did not expect to remain in SA: 4 planned to remain in SA but not work for an institution; 40 planned to pursue a career in a field other than student affairs; 6 planned to work in consultancy; 20 planned to retire; 2 planned to return to school; and the others replied with 'other' or 'I don't know.' Similarly, the College and University Professional Association for Human Resources (CUPA-HR) surveyed non-faculty HE employees (n = 3,815), of which at least 785 were in SA. Of the respondents, 51% planned to seek opportunities at non-profit organizations, and 64% hoped to find work at private for-profit companies (Bichsel et al., 2022). Next, I turned to studies of the SA practitioner-to-faculty career change to help inform my study of broader career change experiences beyond campus-based roles.

The 'What' and 'How' of SA Professionals' Career Change Experiences

Given the lack of direct research on SA practitioners' career changes beyond campus education, I drew on the SA practitioner-to-faculty transition literature and the public scholarship on SA career changes to establish what former SA professionals experienced during their career change and how they experienced that transition. The first half of this literature section reported findings from empirical studies of the SA-to-faculty career change. Compared to the other career

transitions studied in SA (e.g., role and lifespan changes, promotions, lateral moves to another institution or functional area, or retirement; Kniess et al., 2019), addressing the SA-to-faculty transition literature made sense as individuals undergo a significant adjustment in the content of work (e.g., shifting from administrative to faculty duties of research, teaching, and service; Kniess, 2019). Further, researchers describe the SA-to-faculty transition as a "career change" (McCluskey-Titus & Cawthon, 2004, p. 317; West, 2021, p. 8), a "change" in one's "life" (Lancaster, 2005, p. 196), and "the equivalent of starting a new career" (Benjamin & Lowery, 2017, p. 245). Kniess (2019) explained, "Although you remain within the college and university context, the culture and expectations of faculty are different compared to administrators and will be a career change" (p. 51). Finally, the second half of this section ended with public scholarship insights on the career changes of former SA professionals who left campus-based work. Most of this scholarship included self-published works, such as blogs and podcasts, without peer review.

The Student Affairs Practitioner-to-Faculty Career Change

The student affairs (SA) practitioner-to-faculty transition literature primarily consists of empirical qualitative studies. Although some exceptions exist, such as an open-survey design study (McCluskey-Titus & Cawthon, 2004) and peer-reviewed reflections on practice and how-to-guides (e.g., Benjamin & Lowery, 2017; Lancaster, 2005; Kniess, 2019; Martin 2021a, b; Shriberg, 1994; Underwood & Cawthon, 1999). According to the available empirical literature, full-time SA practitioners move into full-time tenure-track faculty positions in graduate-level higher education and student affairs programs (Lancaster, 2005; Nuss & Schroeder, 2002; Kniess et al., 2017; Wallace & Ford, 2023). Below, I detail the three main literature themes on the SA-to-faculty transition experience: (1) challenges, (2) navigation, and (3) benefits.

Challenges

Transitioning from SA to a faculty career presents a complex experience for SA practitioners, characterized by challenges arising from cultural incongruences between administrative and faculty work cultures. Different values shape these incongruences, as academic culture centers knowledge production, self-governance, and academic freedom, and administrative culture, in which SA sits, prioritizes functional job duties, service, community, and student development (McCluskey-Titus & Cawthon, 2004). McCluskey-Titus and Cawthon (2004) identified the benefits and challenges 38 SA practitioners faced in their move to faculty positions. Participants reported a lack of ease and familiarity with faculty culture, which made their transition difficult. In a study reporting SA practitioners' identity change, Kniess et al. (2017) noted that transitioning to a faculty identity can be difficult. Participants explained that unlike SA, where they worked with teams to pursue collective goals, faculty culture consisted of individuals working on individual goals. Similarly, in Boettcher et al.'s (2019) study of differing senses of community, the 30 former SA participants affirmed they experienced a collegial faculty culture that lacked shared goals and a team focus compared to an SA culture. Finally, in Martinez et al.'s (2020) study of the transition experience, participants indicated missing the SA culture, which they viewed as "mostly caring, collaborative, nurturing, and communal" (p. 375).

Given the cultural incongruences, SA practitioners turned faculty commonly report a lack of support and isolation as challenges. First, SA practitioners leave behind supports for a faculty career, such as personnel to help with administrative work, offices, larger salaries, professional development funds, and information power (particularly senior administrators who led decision-making) (Lancaster, 2005; McCluskey-Titus & Cawthon, 2004; Martin, 2021b; Boettcher et al., 2019). New faculty also report a lack of supervisory and leadership support compared to SA,

leading to work performance ambiguity (Boettcher et al., 2019; Lancaster, 2005). Further, SA practitioners report needing support with research even after their doctoral studies, unlike teaching and service (Martinez et al., 2020). Second, practitioners-turned-faculty find the autonomous and flexible academic culture isolating (Boettcher et al., 2019; Martinez et al., 2020; McCluskey-Titus & Cawthon, 2004; Guillaume et al., 2019). Boettcher et al. (2019) found that participants struggled with isolation from the limited opportunities to collaborate and connect with faculty colleagues. Martinez et al. (2020) reported that though some participants observed college, departmental, and program attempts to address isolation among faculty, such attempts were inconsistent, and silos remained. Some other challenges noted in the literature included the faculty job search, especially for individuals with weaker research publications, work-life balance, balancing research, service, and teaching expectations, and role ambiguity from unclear faculty timelines, deadlines, and expectations (Kniess et al., 2017; Martin, 2021b; Martinez et al., 2020; McCluskey-Titus & Cawthon, 2004; Guillaume et al., 2019).

More recent studies emphasize the impact of structural inequalities related to race, gender, faculty rank, age, and multiple or intersecting identities on the transition of SA practitioners-turned-faculty (Guillaume et al., 2019; Perry et al., 2019; West, 2021, 2022; Wallace & Ford, 2023). In an autoethnographic study framed by critical race and transformative learning theories, Perry et al. (2019) disclosed their transition challenges regarding race, gender, age, class, family roles, faculty rank, intersectionality of identity, and work-life balance. One of the white women co-authors observed the positional power of men in faculty ranks in her transition, and the other co-author struggled to find a woman mentor who had successfully managed tenure with motherhood. In this same study, the Black man co-author described difficulties with anti-Black racism and microaggressions in his transition to the professoriate at a

predominantly white institution with only one tenured Black faculty member. Building on Perry et al.'s work, West's (2021, 2022) Black feminist-inspired scholarly personal narratives about her administrator-to-faculty transition further demonstrated that Black women may face unique challenges while transitioning from administrative to faculty roles given the historical and intersectional legacies of racism and sexism embedded in higher education (HE). For instance, West (2021) learned that some colleagues regarded her qualitative publications disrupting dominant narratives of Black women in HE with inferiority during her job negotiations, and she received "lackluster" (p. 7) introductions from her hiring department, unlike other new faculty who were men or white. Similarly, Wallace and Ford (2023) identified and explored how the cultural capital they gained as Black men in multicultural affairs roles aided their transition to faculty. Having started their faculty roles in the Summer of 2020, Wallace and Ford (2023) experienced numbness as their institutions remained silent and "continued business as usual" (p. 8) through the state-sanctioned murder of George Floyd.

Navigation

Former practitioners indicate that preparation, faculty and peer support, SA identity and experiences, cultural identities, and critical theories shaped their transition and navigation. First, practitioners prepare for adjustments to faculty culture and expectations, mainly teaching and research (Kniess et al., 2017; Lancaster, 2005; Martinez et al., 2020; West, 2021, 2022). While doctoral education serves as preparation for faculty work, most practitioners pursue doctoral education to advance their SA careers and require additional preparation to be competitive in the faculty job market once they shift career plans (Martinez et al., 2020; McCluskey-Titus & Cawthon, 2004; West, 2021). In a reflection, Lancaster (2005) shared that adjunct teaching as a senior-level SA helped him gain exposure to students in a class setting and faculty work.

Similarly, West (2021) gained familiarity with faculty research expectations from her graduate assistantship, wherein she co-published and aided her advisor with tenure materials.

Second, faculty and peer support shape the SA-to-faculty transition through formative opportunities to develop research, teaching, and service skills and insights on barriers facing marginalized intellectuals (Kniess et al., 2017; McCluskey-Titus & Cawthon, 2004; West, 2021). Faculty mentors redirect SA practitioners to a faculty career (Kniess et al., 2017; Martinez et al., 2020). Martinez et al. (2020) found that "faculty mentors not only planted seeds but also cultivated them by providing insights into academia, helping students establish and/or expand their networks, and affording teaching and publishing opportunities for them to be well-positioned for the tenure track" (p. 372). Plus, practitioners with marginalized identities sought support from faculty with similar positionalities to gain insider information about ways to manage exclusion (e.g., racism, sexism, tenure power, etc.) in faculty careers (Perry et al., 2019; West, 2021). For practitioners who could not find faculty mentors who had also worked in SA and/or shared their positionalities, peers offered support, like affirming the role of identities in the transition (Guillaume et al., 2019; Perry et al., 2019; Wallace & Ford, 2023; West, 2021). Indeed, Guillaume et al. (2019), Perry et al. (2019), and Wallace and Ford (2023) used narrative methodologies to study and support each other's transitions.

Third, practitioners leverage SA identity and experiences to meet faculty expectations (Kniess et al., 2017; Martinez et al., 2020; Guillaume et al., 2019; Wallace & Ford, 2023). SA identity and mindset emerged as sub-themes of Kniess et al.'s (2017) analysis of participants' perceptions of their new faculty identities. Several participants retained their SA identity and mindset in their faculty roles to support their faculty work. Similarly, after their transitions, Martinez et al.'s (2020) participants also felt connected to SA work and identity. West (2021) is

an exception as she shed her SA identity. West (2021) attributes this to her involuntary exit (e.g., layoff) and experiences of job insecurity, racism, and sexism as a Black woman in SA, contrasting the voluntary transitions to faculty commonly studied. Furthermore, the knowledge, training, mindsets, values, beliefs, attitudes, and skills individuals cultivated in continued to influence their faculty work (Guillaume et al., 2019; Kniess et al., 2017; Martinez et al., 2020; Perry et al., 2020). For instance, Guillaume et al. (2019) leveraged their past SA work with diverse student populations to deliver student-centered teaching and advising (e.g., being available to students). Similarly, Martinez et al. (2020) reported the transferable SA skills that helped practitioners navigate faculty roles, such as "program assessment, communication skills, political navigation, and collegiality" (p. 376). Practitioners felt most prepared to meet service expectations given their prior SA service work (Martinez et al., 2020; Guillaume et al., 2019).

Finally, recent studies framed by critical cultural theories show that SA practitioners' social and cultural identities and cultural epistemologies also shape and aid their transition to faculty (Guillaume et al., 2019; Perry et al., 2019; West, 2021, 2022; Wallace & Ford, 2023). To illustrate, West (2021, 2022) experienced and managed her transition through an epistemological framework of Black feminist thought (BFT). From BFT, West (2022) adopted an "outsider-and-indifferent" (p. 125) stance, refusing to overly invest in higher education (HE) systems that upheld promotion structures dismissive of Black women's knowledge and contributions. In time, West (2022) shed her prior SA mindset, wherein she "was deeply connected to postsecondary education as if it were an animate object that [she] loved but who would not or could not love [her] back" (p. 120). Further, West (2021, 2022) used a "within-and-invested" (p. 125) stance to challenge institutional practices that harmed Black women. While West (2021, 2022) shed her SA mindset, Wallace and Ford (2023) identified the cultural capital (i.e., navigation, resistance,

familial, and aspirational) they formed as two Black men multicultural affairs professionals (MAPs) and how these forms of capital aided their transitions. For instance, working in MAPs, an area of SA often in opposition to HE institutions and rooted in activism, taught Wallace and Ford how to navigate HE policies, hidden rules, and unjust systems and resist inequities. In turn, they used the navigational capital gained in SA to move through similar HE systems expecting unequal labor from Black faculty and resistance capital to center minoritized populations in their scholarship, teaching, and service. Studies like West (2021, 2022) and Wallace and Ford (2022) fill a key gap by showing the impact of membership in multiple and intersecting marginalized cultural groups (i.e., women and/or Black Americans) on the SA-to-faculty transition.

Benefits

Based on the limited insights on transition benefits, SA practitioners who transitioned to faculty enjoy job flexibility and satisfaction and aid SA colleagues and students. Some faculty listed a flexible schedule as a benefit of the transition (Boettcher et al., 2019; Lancaster, 2005; Martin, 2021b; McCluskey-Titus & Cawthon, 2004). Lancaster (2005) found the absence of an office surrounding to be "liberating (p. 197) and "enjoyed having no daily calendar and appointments" (p. 197). Yet, work flexibility does not necessarily mean faculty enjoy an improved quality of life compared to SA practitioners. Martinez et al. (2020) reported, "Despite the flexibility afforded to faculty members, most participants spoke about working harder as a faculty member. In many ways, their work lives were without boundaries (Gonzales et al., 2013)" (p. 376). Still, practitioners-turned-faculty experience job satisfaction (Lancaster, 2005; West, 2021a, b). For West (2021, 2022), the most significant outcome of the transition included the ability to live more genuinely as a Black feminist scholar-pracademic within and outside the academy, indicating job and life satisfaction. Finally, faculty from SA benefit SA colleagues and

students (Kniess et al., 2017; Martin, 2021b; West, 2022). In Kniess et al.'s (2017) study, participants were translators between student affairs and faculty cultures. Additionally, former practitioners benefit students in SA graduate programs who want to learn from faculty with recent administrative expertise in the SA field (Martin, 2021b).

Career Changes Beyond Campus-Based Paths

This section covered themes from my review of public scholarship on the career change experiences of SA professionals. Drawing on podcasts, blogs, and limited peer-reviewed texts, I analyzed the transition of individuals who exited SA for new industries or SA-adjacent careers, defined as work in educational consulting or organizations (e.g., for-profit, non-profit, or government; Brown & Trudell, 2019). Challenges, navigation, and benefits emerged as core themes that overlap with and differ from the SA-to-faculty transition. Public scholarship covered voluntary (un)planned versus involuntary transitions (e.g., forced exits; Kuk et al., 2012).

Challenges

SA practitioners experienced a range of challenges when transitioning to new careers. Undergoing a professional and personal identity crisis is a common challenge for practitioners (Brown & Trudell, 2019; Edwards, 2022; ProudnotLoud, 2023; Scheibler, 2017). Before their exits from SA, practitioners deeply identified with SA work as a "passion" (Smith, 2020, 51:50:03), "purpose" (Edwards, 2022, para 28), "calling" (Davis, 2022, para 2), and "identity" (ProudnotLoud, 2023, para 4). In an online *Reddit* discussion on exiting SA, ProudnotLoud (2023) posted, "I felt I was giving up my identity" (para 4). Indeed, the disruption to one's personal and professional identity can be emotional (Edwards, 2022; Studdert, 2021a; ProudnotLoud, 2023). Writing for *Inside Higher Ed*, Elue and Simula (2023) explained that HE professionals experience grief as they let go of an "imagined future—the idea of a career that

never materialized or even the ideal version of academic institutions [they] were led to believe in that conflicted with [their] lived experiences" (para 4). This identity crisis may grow in complexity for practitioners with marginalized identities. In a *Chronicle of Higher Education* article, Davis (2022), a first-generation Black woman college student, recounted how she entered SA to pay forward "all of the grace, support, tears, dreams and hopes that had been invested in [her] development" (para 2), so "leaving that world was like losing a piece of [herself]" (para 3). Amidst grieving their SA future, individuals face the complex task of redefining themselves and their sense of work (Brown & Trudell, 2019; Hoffman, 2021; ProudnotLoud, 2023; Williams, 2019). In a *Student Affairs Now* podcast episode titled "Lessons Learned from Leaving Student Affairs," Rita shared how her career change forced her to detangle her self-worth from work, which was difficult as she saw SA as her "life's work" and "identity" (Edwards, 2022, para 16).

Additionally, SA professionals who pursued SA-adjacent careers faced scrutiny and ostracization. Hoffman, co-founder of the *Pivoting Out of Edu* consultancy, admitted she negatively evaluated job applicants who had left HE as a SA hiring manager and, in turn, worried about scrutiny if she ever chose to return to HE (Hoffman & Studdert, 2021a). Further, SA colleagues scrutinized individuals, assuming their departures were motivated by greed (Hoffman & Studdert, 2021a; Scheibler, 2017; Wellhouser, 2016). In *Talking Stick*, a campus housing magazine, Charles, who left SA to work for a college software company, disclosed, "There were jokes about going over to the dark side, and there were people with whom my relationship changed when I [left SA]" (Scheibler, 2017, p. 54). In the same magazine, Tara, who left SA to lead a national Greek letter organization, reported, "While I may still perceive myself as an educator, there are a number of people who I interact with on and off campuses that do not share that perception" (Scheibler, 2017, p. 55). Similarly, professionals who pursued SA-adjacent roles

reported barriers to participation at SA conferences, such as higher registration costs, inability to submit proposals, and suspicion (Brown & Trudell, 2019; Scheibler, 2017; Smith, 2020).

SA practitioners' transition challenges continued into their new work environments (Brown & Trudell, 2019; Davis, 2022; Smith, 2020). Brown and Davis (2019) experienced that "Work outside of academe often does not denote time in semesters, communicates and organizes work differently, and can have vastly different political and reward structures" (p. 68). Company leaders hesitate to hire SA practitioners from HE, questioning their ability to generate profits (Loucy, 2015; Smith, 2020). Further, former SA practitioners found the transition to corporate language and metrics, such as Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and Objectives and Key Results (OKRs), difficult to navigate (Smith, 2020; Studdert & Hoffman, 2021). Additionally, some SA practitioners found shifting from larger HE organizations to smaller for-profit, non-profit, or self-employment structures challenging (Davis, 2022; Scheibler, 2017). Charles, introduced above, pointed out that there are fewer people to collaborate with at smaller companies, and employee benefits, like health insurance, tend to be more expensive (Scheibler, 2017). Similarly, Brown and Trudell (2019) missed HE's collegial decision-making models, support for workplace equity and multiculturalism, and resources, like library access and tuition remission. Similarly, others missed working in a college environment (e.g., green space; world-class speakers) and with students (Studdert & Hoffman, 2021; Davis, 2022).

There are two more challenges worth noting despite their limited coverage. First, for some, leaving SA can take years and after exiting people may work multiple jobs before finding a career, and those who find success in their first post-SA job can still feel unsure about their future (Edwards, 2022; Hoffman & Studdert, 2021a; Loucy, 2015). Second, practitioners with marginalized identities likely experience transition challenges differently (Studdert & Hoffman,

2022). For instance, Davis (2022) noted how her transition involved workplace inequities, writing, “As a Black woman, for example, I had to face the fact that racism, sexism, misogyny, and white privilege were daily menu items at whatever table I chose to join” (para 10).

Navigation

Most individuals experience planned career changes because of their preparation. To exit SA, individuals used preparation strategies, such as clarifying motives, mental preparation, seeking support, networking, career research, skill development, and job material updates (Davis, 2022; Eng, 2020; Loucy, 2015; Scheibler, 2017; Williams, 2019; Wellhouser, 2016). In *Talking Stick*, Amma recalled having a plan for her transition, explaining, “There was a lot of saving money and taking classes on how to run a business effectively” and studying “the landscape of speakers” (p. 53). Yet, some left SA without a plan, instead relying on adaptive strategies (Edwards, 2022; Smith, 2022; Scheibler, 2017). Rita, burnt out, left SA without a plan, undergoing multiple transitions (Edwards, 2022). She did not work for seven months before a brief stint at an IT company that did not interest her. The employment gap and IT role restored her energy, and, unlike SA, gave her time to volunteer. From volunteering, Rita realized self-employment and community consulting would allow her to continue the equity work she prized in SA in a “balanced” way (Edwards, 2022, para 16). Some individuals experienced both (un)planned career changes. Paul, who planned his exit from SA to faculty, experienced an unanticipated shift during his doctoral studies from speaking gigs he took to fund his education (Scheibler, 2017). In time, Paul left his planned faculty path for an uncharted one.

In another strategy, individuals used transferable skills to manage their (un)planned transitions. In the Expatriates of SA Facebook group, 29 individuals from varying career industries completed Eng’s (2020) survey about leaving SA for a career change. Respondents’

top SA skills that aided their transitions included technology, communications, event planning, counseling, assessment, project management, budget management, data analytics, customer service, critical thinking, equity-based practices, training and facilitation, research, and marketing (Eng, 2020). For SA practitioners who went into SA-aligned roles, prior knowledge of campus and student trends helped them excel in their new roles (Scheibler, 2017; Smith, 2020). For instance, Matthew explained that he leveraged his HE expertise in a for-profit company to help product developers and engineers improve HE products (Smith, 2020).

In both (un)planned career changes, individuals relied on support from friends, mentors, agencies, online platforms (e.g., Facebook, LinkedIn, etc.), former SA practitioners who changed careers, and SA professional associations, graduate programs, and supervisors (Edwards, 2022; Hoffman & Studdert, 2021a; ProudnotLoud, 2023; Scheibler, 2017; Studdert & Hoffman, 2021; Smith, 2020; Williams, 2019; Wellhouser, 2016). These support systems offered advice, career coaching, networking, job opportunities, emotional outlets, and skill development. For example, a friend's career change gave Tom the confidence to leave SA and begin anew (Studdert & Hoffman, 2021). Tom's former student also offered him a job at his start-up sales company. When Tom left his new role after four months due to imposter syndrome, his former student-turned-CEO worked with him to address his concerns and affirmed his prior SA skills.

In their transitions, some maintained their working identity as educators while others modified their work and career meanings. Those who went into SA adjacent paths insisted, "I'm still an educator at heart, and it pervades everything I do" (Scheibler, 2017, p. 58) and "once an educator, always an educator" (Davis, 2022, para 18). Amma, for instance, maintained her practitioner identity, especially with SA colleagues who treated her differently as a HE entrepreneur, pointing to their "common goal" "for students to leave their time with us better" (p.

55). Yet, individuals who once identified SA as a source of passion, purpose, and energy began to look to family and community to fulfill their needs after exiting SA (Edwards, 2022; Hoffman & Studdert, 2021a). In a career panel, Michael discussed a shift in his sense of work after exiting SA, stating, "[Passion] helps certainly but it's not necessary. You can take your skills… elsewhere, make more money, and with that money comes more time to do the things that you're passionate about, like volunteer…and hang out with your family" (Smith, 2020, 51:00:08). The transition also widened individuals' sense of careers (Edwards, 2022). Michael shared, "I was going to become a Dean of Students and that was it…having left a university…[I] realized …in other industries…things can change and grow in different ways" (Smith, 2020, 11:23:12).

Although receiving limited coverage, SA practitioners with marginalized identities experience career change differently due to workplace inequities, relying on culturally relevant strategies and support to cope (Davis, 2022; Williams, 2019). In Williams' (2019) dissertation study, Black women who exited SA due to intersecting workplace inequities (e.g., racism, sexism, and misogynoir) used culturally relevant strategies and supports to heal. One participant, Troy, drew on her "South Carolinian" and "Texan" "roots" to engage in "good ole home, ancestral type of healing" and "cleansing," sharing, "I had to cry. I had to pray. …I had to chant" (Williams, 2019, p. 166). In the same study, another participant, Jodie, shared that she looked to professionals of color for understanding during her transition (Williams, 2019). In an advice article on leaving SA, Davis (2022), a Black woman, described her strategy of prioritizing equity in her career search. Davis (2022) shared, "I knew I had to choose a career and an employer that shared my own aspirational values around inclusion, equity, and opportunities for all" (para 10).

Benefits

Former SA professionals experienced fulfillment and satisfaction in changing careers. Individuals who entered SA-adjacent roles experienced specific benefits, such as working in a results-driven environment and having a broader impact on students and HE institutions (Hoffman & Studdert, 2021a; Scheibler, 2017; Smith, 2020). Further, individuals, in SA-adjacent roles and beyond, enjoyed work-life balance, flexible work arrangements, better pay, and opportunities to develop new skills (Brown & Trudell, 2019; Edwards, 2022; Hoffman & Studdert, 2021a; Marshall et al., 2016; Scheibler, 2017; Williams, 2019). While some individuals worked longer hours than SA, they also felt adequately compensated (Marshall et al., 2016; Studdert & Hoffman, 2021). Additionally, individuals gained opportunities to build skills after transitioning, such as incorporating new knowledge areas (Scheibler, 2017; Williams, 2019) and fiscal decision-making (Smith, 2020). Moreover, individuals with marginalized identities experienced benefits, such as equity and agency. Davis (2022), a Black woman, listed her new workplace's equity culture as a transition perk. Troy, introduced above, experienced a planned transition, which protected her agency as a Black woman. Troy explained, "when you leave on your own terms, you get to keep your narrative, and you get to retain control of it" (Williams, 2019, p. 165). Despite these benefits, some remained open to returning to SA, but only if offered benefits comparable to their new careers (Edwards, 2022; Hoffman & Studdert, 2021a; Smith, 2020). Moreover, former SA professionals actively shared their transition journeys with current SA professionals to benefit others' careers (Scheibler, 2017; Studdert, 2021; Wellhouser, 2016). The next and final section details the implications for studying former SA professionals' career change experience based on the above literature review.

Implications: A Call for Studying Career Changes Beyond Campus-Based Paths

In my review of the SA attrition literature, I found that even though SA scholars have failed to define attrition rates more recently (*what*) (Surrett, 2021, 2024), they have put great effort into identifying attrition causes (*why*), *who* leaves (i.e., frequently but not limited to entry-level professionals with marginalized identities), and even *where* they go (i.e., other HE paths, like faculty, adjacent roles, new industries, or unconventional career alternatives). While this literature depicts the broad pre-transition realities of SA professionals, it overlooks the career development of former SA professionals, including how they experience career change.

Hernandez (2018) noted that the SA field has overlooked "what happens after practitioners leave, what fields, if any, they gravitated towards, or how satisfied they are in their roles" (p. 15–16). This lack of inquiry into the career changes of SA professionals who left campus-based roles in part may stem from a belief that studying career change compromises employee retention, even though the field cannot retain everybody (Surrett, 2024). Further, this same attrition solving literature conveys that SA professionals face structural work issues, ideal worker norms, and workplace inequities, features of the SA profession, despite the profession's long-standing efforts to respond with policies, structures, and cultures that aid employee retention (Anthony, 2016; Isdell & Wolf-Wendel, 2021). Indeed, actual departures and intentions to leave occur among SA professionals from varied professional levels and social identities, making career change a possibility for those who exit SA. Yet, I found no study of SA practitioners' career change that might facilitate coping or offer guidance for those pushed to leave or opt out of SA. As McClellan (2011) stated, "The literature has much less to offer on the question of how to leave a job–despite the fact that hundreds, if not thousands, of people leave

student-affairs positions each year for one reason or another" (para 1). This dissertation sought to fill this gap by exploring how former SA professionals experienced their career change.

Further, SA attrition studies predominantly highlight person- and context-related attrition factors that drive individuals to leave or opt out of SA. A focus on push factors (e.g., limited jobs, discrimination, burnout, etc.) ignores the influence of pull factors, such as external career opportunities. Even more, individuals may be pulled towards a career change irrespective of SA attrition factors (Surrett, 2021). Relatedly, SA attrition studies typically examine individuals' intentions to leave and actual departures by collecting data from one moment in time (Marshall et al., 2016; Williams, 2019). This cross-sectional lens ignores that career change is a dynamic process experienced within the larger life trajectory of a person (Preoteasa, 2021). Said differently, a "holistic perspective is not possible from routine exit interviews conducted at the time of leaving the career" (Howes & Goodman-Delahunty, 2014, p. 79). Rather than solely focusing on the point before or after departure, researchers must examine the reasons driving a person's career change and their subsequent transition experience by adopting a dynamic lens.

Unlike the attrition scholarship, the SA-to-faculty literature offers valuable insight into the career change experiences of practitioners who leave SA for new careers and how to study such transitions. According to this research, the SA-to-faculty transition experience involves challenges, navigation, and benefits shaped by the differences between administrative and faculty work cultures and expectations. Most notable in this literature is the influence cultural and social identities have on the job change experience of SA practitioners-turned-faculty, emphasizing the importance of culturally relevant theories in understanding the transition experience (West, 2021, 2022). However, the SA-to-faculty transition studies only cover career changes unfolding on HE campuses. While arguably a small gap, this difference may limit our

understanding of career changes involving different work contexts *and/or* content (Feldman, 2002). For instance, while the change to faculty provides some insights, such as the need for support, it may not fully capture the experiences of those who leave campus roles altogether (e.g., loss of support from HE colleagues who disapprove of the transition; Scheibler, 2017). Moreover, Renn (2004) stated, not everyone leaving SA "chooses to enter the relatively small faculty job market, where positions are less available than in the administrative market" (p. 176). Indeed, the focus on the SA-to-faculty transition overlooks the other changes pursued by former SA professionals, including those in adjacent or new sectors. As such, research is needed on the career change experiences of those who choose not to remain on a college campus.

In the absence of studies, the non-peer-reviewed public scholarship by former SA professionals who pursued a career change beyond campus roles helps illuminate individuals' experiences with this change. This public scholarship, like the SA-to-faculty transition findings, suggests that an individual's career change experience consists of challenges, navigation, and benefits. At the same time, this body of work offers reflections on practice from those who left SA to distill advice current SA practitioners can apply to their transitions, rather than offering stories that explicate the nuances of the transition experience. Plus, this public scholarship lacks theoretical or conceptual lenses on how a person's work and life contexts, decisions, positionality, and dynamic career histories inform their change. This scholarship hardly acknowledges that an individual's positionality (e.g., gender, race, class, state of health, past career and life experiences, etc.) shapes their transition, unlike the SA-to-faculty transition literature, which employs critical cultural theories to uncover experiences with workplace inequities, identities, and culturally relevant support systems and navigation strategies. While the SA-to-faculty scholarship briefly covers the dynamic aspects of changing careers, the public

scholarship hardly considers the career trajectory of the person transitioning. Taken together with the above literature insights, there is a need to examine the career changes of former SA practitioners from a dynamic, agentic, and social lens, which this study fulfilled.

Conclusion

To conclude, former SA professionals' career change experiences lack empirical recognition and theoretical analysis. Coverage of their career change experiences is primarily restricted to prescriptive accounts in public scholarship. Given these gaps, I will detail how I studied the career changes of former SA professionals using stories in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3: STORY AS METHODOLOGY

I open this chapter with my relationship (positionality) and approach to (epistemology) the study of career change. Following, I describe my story methodology. I end with the research design, which introduces the five storytellers, their selection process, and their field texts.

Researcher Positionality

On a warm August day in 2021, I escaped my godchildren's playful laughter indoors and perched down on my comadre's (best friend's) porch steps for a Zoom meeting with my advisor. I needed help deciding between two dissertation paths. While one path reflected my long-standing interest in Women of Color's (WOC) higher education (HE) experiences, the other path, career change, emerged unexpectedly in a Spring course. To help, my advisor prompted me to think about my career plans. In response, my eyes watered up, and I felt shame.

Naively, I applied to Ph.D. programs eager to learn about research. Yet, I remain hesitant about a faculty career given my psychological barriers (i.e., imposter syndrome) and academia's evaluation structures. In my Ph.D. applications, I had left out that I was desperate to escape a workplace bullying situation in my last student affairs (SA) role. Back then, I felt forced to do a job search, leave SA, or pursue a doctorate. To not waste my time spent in SA, I pursued a Ph.D., hoping to chart a safer career path. Despite my varied motives, I believed I would figure things out like I had most of my life, learning by doing. I could always return to multicultural SA as a backup. However, on the porch, the tears alerted me to the confusion I still felt about my career.

I first learned about careers from their absence in my immigrant family. My Punjabi parents worked across manufacturing, financial services, retail, healthcare, and hospitality industries, normalizing change in my worldview. That said, my parents associated their shifting employment with precarity, pushing my brother and me towards careers in medicine or

engineering, which signified lifelong stability for them. Eventually, as a first-generation college student who felt shaky about their academic foundations, I cherished the support of SA women and WOC mentors in college and learned about other careers in SA in support of students.

Fast forward to Spring 2021, a year into the Covid-19 pandemic, SA attrition encircled me. In a course paper on WOC SA professionals' friendships, participants and their friends had or intended to leave SA. My mentors from chapter one, Nel and Afreewomxn, also exited SA. As someone who relied on mentors to navigate unfamiliar terrains, like a career, I felt confused. If these equity-minded professionals with underrepresented identities exited SA because they felt overworked, undervalued, and underpaid, could I last in SA or HE? Did I want to, without them?

SA literature also confounded me. Scholars concerned with SA attrition highlighted how multiply marginalized entry- and mid-level professionals faced ideal worker norms resulting from exclusionary structures (e.g., racism, heterosexism, etc.) (Kortegast, 2021; Williams, 2019). Indeed, my mentors' experiences as Queer and/or women and WOC left them feeling that their well-being was at risk within SA. They changed careers because they could not afford to wait for SA to change, even concluding that SA did not want to change. Despite these stories, the dismissal of career change in the SA research reflected an illusion of meritocracy to me, placing the sole responsibility for career change on individuals who choose to leave versus collectives willing to help individuals leave well while improving SA working conditions (Bal et al., 2020).

As a South Asian Sikh Queer WOC who worked in SA, I intuited that career change from SA can arise in response to neoliberal working conditions built on the "low-paid, low status and insecure work of less fortunate individuals and social groups" (Bal et al., 2020, p. 90). Relatedly, as an able-bodied, cisgender, and English-speaking doctoral student affiliated with a highly intensive research university in the U.S. white-settler context, I also know that career change is a

"form of privilege" "that may be accessible only to a limited number of educated and skilled professionals" seeking to improve their place in neoliberal workplaces (Bal et al., 2020, p. 90). I share this researcher positionality to outline that my social differences, career assumptions, and SA relationships inform this study of career change from SA, from the research questions asked to the epistemology and methodology detailed in the subsequent sections.

Epistemology

In this study, I drew on social constructionism, an interpretive framework, for my epistemology. Epistemology refers to "how we know what we know" (Bhattacharya, 2017, p. 6), including the researcher's assumptions about the nature of knowledge (e.g., how knowledge is constituted, evaluated and where it unfolds) (Hofer, 2002). From social constructionism, I knew that knowledge about career change is not objective, stable, complete, or neutral but socially negotiated, partial, and fluid, and stories can help to create and represent such knowledge.

I drew on social constructionism, given its theoretical and empirical place in career research. Many epistemological assumptions in career scholarship, especially before the 1970s, drew on logical positivism (e.g., knowledge is value-free, linear, and context-free) (Patton, 2019). However, as careers in the Global North shifted from being organizationally constructed to individually defined and increasingly mobile across physical and psychological boundaries (e.g., career transitions), career theorizing embraced interpretive frameworks, such as constructivism and social constructionism (Patton, 2019; Tsuda-McCaie & Kotera, 2021).

According to constructivism, individuals construct knowledge through experiences that unfold in their lives, including reflections on those experiences through a meaning-making process (Bhattacharya, 2017; Bujold, 2004; Patton, 2019). Social constructionism differs from constructivism, emphasizing human knowing as a social process over a cognitive process. Both

agree on "connectedness between individuals and their contexts, narrative discourse, meaning making, subjectivity and personal agency" (Patton, 2019, p. 76). Yet, social constructionism also emphasizes the role of others and power relations in shaping knowledge. Drawing on social constructionism, I expected multiple meanings to emerge about the career change experience based on individuals' positionality (e.g., identities, relationships, contexts).

Career scholars who have employed constructivism and social constructionism view stories as a way of knowing about people's careers. Promoting a narrative lens in career research, Cochran (1990) argued that individuals "live in story" (p. 73), "represent life in story" (p. 73), "explain through story" (p. 74), and "comprehend through story" (p. 74). Further, Cohen and Mallon (2001) argued that stories can help create knowledge about careers as they attend to "both the holistic nature of career as well as to specific career transitions" (p. 48). Stories organize experience into a sequence of events (before, middle, ending) and promote sensemaking, uncovering inconsistencies, paradoxes, and contradictions in one's thoughts about career (Cohen & Mallon, 2001). Further, stories highlight the retrospective nature of knowing since individuals look back at their past to make sense of career events within their larger life (Cohen & Mallon, 2001). Finally, stories reflect the role of social structures in knowing. While individuals can enact agency in their careers through retelling and revising stories, these stories still reflect, reproduce, and challenge the dominant career scripts found in a person's social environments. Having shared my epistemology, I now turn to my methodology.

Story as Methodology

"To describe a person's career is to tell a story." Cochran, 1990, p. 71

In narrative research, there is a common assertion that individuals live, communicate, and form meaning through stories (Clandinin, 2006; McAlpine, 2016). Narrative research involves

"telling stories, recounting—accounting for—how individuals make sense of events and actions in their lives with themselves as the agents" (McAlpine, 2016, p. 34). Further, narratives reflect a temporal order as individuals revise their past and future sense of life, identity, and experiences from their shifting present (Clandinin, 2006; McAlpine, 2016). The assumption of accessibility and familiarity of stories leads narrative researchers to use stories to account for human experience. Indeed, Clandinin (2006) explained that narrative inquiry is the "study of experience as a story," wherein the researcher is concerned with "storied lives" and aims to "describe such lives, collect and tell stories of them, and write narratives of experience" (p. 45).

I used stories, a narrative methodology, to understand former SA professionals' career change experiences (Cohen & Mallon, 2001). Here, it is necessary to distinguish story from narrative. For Smith (2016), "A story is a specific tale that people tell. In contrast, a narrative is a resource that culture and social relations make available to us, and, in turn, we use to help construct our stories" (p. 204). Stories reflect what narratives do to people (e.g., frame experiences) and the storyteller's agency as individuals are "not condemned to live out the narrative resources passed on through culture" (Smith, 2016, p. 206). Using a story methodology, I knew storytellers would negotiate narratives in their career change stories.

I drew inspiration from Cohen and Mallon (2001), who used story as their methodology to study career transitions, given its everyday relevance and familiarity across different contexts and audiences. Cohen and Mallon (2001) used "story" to "describe the complex, baggy, sometimes contradictory, often circuitous accounts of their careers that people construct in the course of research conversations" (p. 50). Writing before Cohen and Mallon, Arthur et al. (1999) also observed that individuals create career stories about how they enact their careers, where a "career story is based on the events, such as job moves and job titles of the objective career, but

also includes memories of subjective career phenomena such as satisfactions, emotions, and ambitions" (p. 42). Guided by these insights, I employed stories to understand the career change experiences of former student affairs professionals and to address the research questions: How do former student affairs professionals experience their career change?

Combined with my positionality and epistemology, I used a story methodology to co-generate stories with the storytellers (participants) rather than collect them (Denzin, 2013; McAlpine, 2016). The generated stories "represent accounts of participants' lives that are already 'edited' as they emerge—that is, reduced by location, time, format, and interlocutor—for a specific research purpose" (McAlpine, 2016, p. 40). Instead of lamenting my role over how to generate, analyze, and present the stories, I expected my role as the researcher-author to shape the stories (Cohen & Mallon, 2001). As such, in this study, I did not limit knowledge to predictability, generalizability, validity, or an ultimate career change experience. Instead, with stories, I sought to "open up an area" of SA career research by producing one (*not the definitive*) conceptualized description of SA professionals' career change experiences (Wise & Millward, 2005, p. 414). The next section describes how I approached this effort with my research design.

Research Design

Having described the methodology, I elaborate on the research design in this section. First, I outline the process for recruiting and selecting the storytellers. Then, I outline how I generated stories about career change with the storytellers. I end with a note on confidentiality.

The Storytellers

Here, I introduce the storytellers—Josephine, Andrew, Danilo, Veronica, and Ash. First, I explain how the storytellers were selected and then provide individual profiles to connect readers to each storyteller. The storytellers in this study met the following selection criteria:

(a) underwent a career change, namely, exited their SA career and entered a new career

(b) variation of social identities (e.g., race, gender, sexual orientation, class, etc.),

(c) variation in new career industries (e.g., human resources, K–12 education, etc.), and

(d) variation in post-transition outcomes (e.g., long-term employment, work role or organizational transitions, returning to higher education, etc.).

The first parameter ensured that storytellers addressed the research construct and context under investigation. The second parameter reflects a desire to expand career research and theorizing historically derived from white men (Chinyamurindi, 2012; Thomsen et al., 2022) and to support the career development needs of a diverse SA workforce (Pritchard & McChesney, 2018). Lastly, I included the final two parameters given that professionals exit SA for varied industries with little known about their post-transition experiences (Brown & Trudell, 2019; Eng, 2020).

Recruiting Storytellers

I recruited storytellers from 52 professionals who participated in a YouTube panel series, "Student Affairs Expat Panels," hosted by Jeannie Jaworski, a former student affairs professional. Jeannie's panel series explored the career changes of former SA professionals. At first, to ensure ethical research practices involving digital contexts (Varis, 2014), I emailed Jeannie Jaworski in May 2022 to introduce myself, the study, and my interest in using the YouTube playlist (Appendix A). I asked Jeannie for her consent to use the YouTube playlist as a research site and to contact the 52 participants for their subsequent consent to access their panel responses. In my email, I also shared with Jeannie my plans to credit her in my study.

Once I secured Jeannie's consent (Appendix A), I used the panelists' LinkedIn and email information she provided to introduce myself, the study, and my communication with Jeannie (Appendix B). I used these communications before securing study approval to gauge if the

YouTube playlist could serve as a viable research site. This outreach did not replace the formal participant recruitment process discussed below. I contacted panelists for permission to use their panel responses and to know if they were open to further participation. I clarified that I was still finalizing details and would circle back for formal recruitment once the study was approved. Of the 52 panelists, 37 supported using their responses and further participation as needed. This initial interest in the study contrasted with Frank's (2013) dissertation observation that professionals who have left the SA field are "difficult to locate" or "may no longer feel tied to the profession and, therefore, reluctant to assist with new research" (p. 10).

After finalizing a story approach for this study, I still decided to recruit storytellers from the interested 37 panelists instead of using a broader recruitment process since each panelist had prior experience discussing their career change online, which I could include as a part of my data generation plans, explained later in this chapter. Jeannie's YouTube playlist also provided information about each interested panelist, helping with purposive sampling (Creswell, 2012).

Selecting Storytellers

I aimed to select five storytellers given the range of two to eleven participants included in narrative research on career change (Tsuda-McCaie & Kotera, 2021; McMahon & Patton, 2018; Preoteasa, 2021; Wise & Millward, 2005). To select the storytellers, I watched all fourteen videos in Jeannie's YouTube playlist featuring the 37 interested panelists who had left SA for a new career. Jeannie organized each video panel by the new career industries of the former SA professionals. These included government and policy, other paths, diversity and inclusion, non-profit, technology industry, private housing, K–12, administration, management and marketing, higher education, counseling and therapy, career and life coaching, human resources, learning

and development, training, instructional design, and curriculum, and other education. Each panel video is more than an hour long with a varying number of panelists, ranging from two to five.

I created a spreadsheet to organize notes about the panelists. I was open to selecting panelists who had left SAHE altogether as well as those who pursued adjacent paths. Since I was interested in selecting storytellers, I gravitated towards panelists who disclosed subjective details (e.g., emotions, challenges, etc.) in addition to the objective aspects of their career change when answering Jeannie's panel questions (i.e., What was your path prior to your current role?). Next, I prioritized panelists who discussed their social identities relative to their transition (i.e., race, gender, class, etc.), aware that not all could disclose their identities in this digital context, thus limiting my selection to those who felt comfortable with such disclosures. From these two steps, I narrowed the list down to 17 panelists.

From here, I explored combinations of panelists whose new career industries varied from each other. I also prioritized panelists if they disclosed unique career change outcomes that differed from others. For example, one panelist mentioned returning to higher education after his career change, and another mentioned undergoing two transitions after their career change. Ultimately, I identified five storytellers whose panel responses and communication with me during my initial outreach left me wanting to know more, which I elaborate on in the storyteller profiles below. I placed the remaining panelists on an alternate list. Once this study was approved and I received MSU's IRB permission, I formally invited the five storytellers by email (Appendix C). The email described the study consent form (Appendix D), activities (i.e., secondary data, demographic survey, interviews, and collaboration), incentive ($70 e-gift card), and next steps (e.g., scheduling interviews and reviewing prompts).

Storyteller Profiles

This section introduces readers to the five storytellers, particularly relevant information about their SA careers and eventual career changes. I also note my initial impression of each storyteller, including their distinctive backgrounds and experiences that shaped my selection choices. Details for each storyteller (i.e., pseudonym, identities, prior SA functional areas, years in SA, and career fields after the career change) are summarized in Table 1.

Josephine. Josephine is a Black Queer woman who was the first in her family to go to college. Josephine did not have "any idea" of what she wanted to do post-college and eventually "fell into student affairs" through a series of campus jobs, summer internships, and mentoring relationships with student affairs (SA) professionals. After college, Josephine worked as a full-time hall director, a role that inspired her to pursue her graduate education in SA, which also supported her Queer identity formation and, in turn, inspired her to support students similarly, particularly Black women. She intended to be a "ResLifer to the end," explaining, "Like, when people say they worked at a job for 20–25 years, I'm like that's going to be me doing something in this field." Josephine came close to this goal. She worked in SA for 15 years across five different higher education (HE) institutions in residence life and housing roles before moving through successive roles in a Dean of Students office. In her final SA role, she served as the Interim Dean of Students before changing her career to a human resources role at a non-profit.

When I first contacted Josephine about my study and asked her permission to use her YouTube panel interview, her support stood out compared to the other panelists. She emphasized that she would be "honored to have the opportunity to participate" as she "believe[d] in the

Table 1

Storyteller Profiles

Storyteller Pseudonym	Target and Dominant Identities Disclosed by Storytellers	Student Affairs (SA) Functional Area(s)	Professional Level Before Career Change	Years in SA	New Career Field(s)
Josephine	Black Queer woman, first-generation student, grew up low income, married	Residence Life; Housing Operations; Dean of Students Office	Senior Level	15	Human Resources
Andrew	White gay man, Scandinavian, raised working class, childhood trauma survivor, doctoral student	Student Leadership Development	Entry-Level	3	International Non-Profit Higher Education Faculty
Danilo	Black man, heterosexual, married, father	Commuter Student Services; Student Life	Mid-Level	5	K–12 Education
Veronica	Black American woman, heterosexual, cis-female, grew up with financial privilege, mother, Ph.D.	Residence Life; Student Life	Mid-Level	10	College Access Non-Profit(s)
Ash	White woman, heterosexual, married, grew up in a poor working-class family with mental health needs, mother, Ph.D.	Residence Life; Student Life; Student Union	Mid-Level	10	High Performance Computing Entrepreneurship

Note. Table 1 summarizes context information related to each storyteller's career change.

action of giving back to higher education as well as the action of 'lifting as I climb,' especially for young Women of Color." As I read her reply, I grew curious. Why does she still give back to higher education after her career change? Why was it essential for her to give back to younger Women of Color? Her response also filled me with gratitude and awe for the Women of Color who continue to mentor me. I decided I had to include her as one of my storytellers.

Andrew. Andrew is a Queer white man who majored in sociology and environmental studies in college. After his sociology faculty deterred him from a faculty career and through his campus activism and student leadership roles involving LGBTQIA+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, Intersex, and Asexual) student needs, Andrew was encouraged to pursue a SA career by SA professionals. In hindsight, he admitted he went into the SA field out of "some indebtedness" to these mentors and because, unlike a faculty career, a SA career path appeared more predictable and stable, which he desired given the precarity in his early life. Looking back, a SA career "was a compromise" that gave Andrew time to figure out "what the path would be." He would not "be the person that stayed in [SA] for 30 years." Following college, Andrew completed a higher education graduate degree. After graduate school, Andrew worked in a student leadership office at a HE institution for three years before changing into a higher education adjacent role with an international non-profit.

In his panel interview with Jeannie, Andrew shared that his non-profit work inspired him to study educational organizations, and he planned to return to HE for a Ph.D. and a faculty career. Andrew's admission struck me as the published empirical career research ignored successive career changes (Sullivan & Ariss, 2021), and the existing SA literature only addressed career transitions from SA roles directly into faculty careers (e.g., Kniess, 2019). I also included

Andrew to stress the significance of studying former SA professionals' career changes as it may help conceptualize why people return, even for a broader HE role (Brown & Trudell, 2019).

Danilo. Danilo is a Black man who worked as a K–12 teacher and later as a sales marketing representative in the private sector before his SA career. Danilo's college mentor, a SA professional who had initially encouraged him to pursue SA during college, eventually recruited Danilo during his return to campus for alumni weekend post-graduation. At the time, Danilo struggled to enact his values of justice and service in the private sector, where he witnessed the exploitation of Black and Brown bodies. Inspired by his parents' public service careers, Danilo hoped a SA career would allow him to "help more Black and Brown individuals get into college." After completing a higher education graduate degree, he worked in SA for five years, first in commuter student services and then in student activities. Eventually, Danilo transitioned out of SA for an administrative role with a K–12 charter organization.

I invited Danilo to participate in this study because he was one of two men of color, specifically Black men, on the list of interested panelists. The other panelist interviewed alongside his wife, which would complicate recruitment. Indeed, Danilo's lens as a Black man proved valuable in highlighting how an upbringing in a Black family and a desire to raise his family shaped his career change experiences, differing from other storytellers' accounts.

Veronica. Veronica is a cis-straight Black woman who studied business in college. Though she intended to pursue a business career, her campus employment in residence life and the admissions office exposed her to SA professionals and conferences that encouraged her toward SA. "When it came time to graduate, I had zero work experience in, like, the business world and tons of experience in the student affairs world," she recalled. During this "college graduate life crisis," Veronica interviewed for and was hired as a hall director. The role

eventually solidified her decision to pursue a graduate degree in educational policy. Veronica worked at four HE institutions in residence and student life roles. After ten years, she left the Assistant Director of Student Life role to lead a college access program at a non-profit.

Veronica's candor, extroversion, and details stood out among her fellow YouTube panelists. I took notice of her repeated message for Black women and WOC watching the panel to get their "money, honey." I invited her to participate, trusting my intuition that it would be enjoyable and valuable to revisit her story with her and learn from her lessons of pursuing financial well-being, inclusion, and agency in her work. She also underwent two additional organizational transitions and completed her doctorate after her career change. Finally, like the other storytellers, I was interested in her insights about experiencing a career change, given her social differences as a heterosexual Black woman and mother.

Ash. Ash is a heterosexual white woman. As a "first-generation college student," Ash "fell into" a SA career because she did not know what she "wanted to do after undergrad." Ash was encouraged to pursue a SA career as a resident assistant by her resident director, who told her, "Well, you've been really good as a RA [resident assistant]. Why don't you think about this?" In her SA graduate program, she and most of her peers aspired to become a Dean of Students in their SA career, which she shifted to a director role once she began working full-time and realized the limited openings for the Dean of Students role. Altogether, Ash worked in SA for ten years in residence life, student life, and student union roles until she underwent an involuntary transition out of SA, resulting in a six-month unemployment period. During this period, she rebuilt her coping resources and applied for a role with a high-performance computing (HPC) organization. Ash worked for the HPC employer for nearly nine years, which

also helped her pay for and finish her doctoral degree. When we met for the study interviews, Ash had begun undergoing another career change into entrepreneurship.

I invited Ash to participate in this study since white women comprise around 51% of the SA profession (Pritchard & McChesney, 2018). Further, I was struck by Ash's admission that she "left student affairs without a plan," unlike the other panelists. An involuntary transition, like leaving without a plan, can be risky (Brazier et al., 2024), and I wanted to know more.

Data Generation

This section describes how I worked with the storytellers to generate field texts about their career change. Field texts (e.g., data sources, like interviews, digital artifacts, notes, etc.) are stories individuals create and share in the field, online or in person, to represent their meanings about an experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The aim was to generate field texts on transitioning from student affairs (SA) into a new or adjacent career industry that prioritized the storyteller's interpretation of their experience. Various methods have been used in career and narrative research to elicit field texts, such as life stories and biographical interviews (Clandinin, 2006; Peake et al., 2012; Preoteasa, 2021). Recognizing that researchers generate data rather than collect or find them (Denzin, 2013), I composed field texts using secondary data from the storytellers' YouTube interviews and two loosely structured interviews. Cohen and Mallon (2001) remind me that stories are "both products and processes" (p. 55). I used both methods to generate a product featuring rich details and to capture the dynamic process of career change and sensemaking with longitudinal data from two points in time (Sullivan & Ariss, 2021). Next, I will describe the methods used to generate the field texts.

YouTube Interviews: Secondary Data

The first field text stemmed from the five storytellers' secondary data from Jeannie Jaworski's YouTube playlist series, "Student Affairs Expat Panels." In this series, Jeannie hosted and recorded fourteen separate panel interviews, each at least an hour long, with three to five panelists by their new career industries (e.g., human resources, K–12, etc.), which she posted to YouTube between June 17, 2020, and July 26, 2020. I included this secondary data because each storyteller had recorded their experiences for a public-facing and general student affairs audience interested in learning about former SA professionals' career changes. Moreover, Jeannie asked every panelist the same questions, generating individual accounts within the panel that could be composed into a field text for each storyteller. For instance, Jeannie asked everyone to share information about their work in student affairs, their job search out of SA, and their new jobs. Jeannie also prompted individuals to share their hardships and the resources that aided their transition. Although these video panels were not "conceived as narratives in their own right," I knew I could restory the generated field text during analysis (McAlpine, 2016, p. 35).

After securing the storyteller's and Jeannie's consent, I generated text-based transcripts (field texts) using only the video portions featuring the selected storytellers. Transcripts ranged between five to eight single-spaced pages for each storyteller and only included the selected storyteller's responses to Jeannie's questions. Since the experience of transitions unfolds objectively and subjectively over time (Bridges, 2003), this secondary data allowed me to understand how SA professionals described and made sense of their career change experience three years before our narrative interviews. Additionally, I used this secondary data to help build rapport with each storyteller during our narrative interviews (e.g., citing their past experiences) and familiarize myself with the context of their career change (actors, events, and themes).

First Interview

Before the first interview, I emailed the storytellers instructions to complete a 15-question demographic survey, which asked them to share their pseudonyms, social identities (e.g., race, gender, etc.), and SA career and education history (Appendix E). I also asked storytellers to review two story prompts before our interview over Zoom, the field where the stories were told. After reading narrative career research and piloting interview protocols with three colleagues who left SA, I realized a structured protocol produced less rich data. As such, I opted for a loosely structured interview protocol to privilege the storytellers' interpretations and contexts. To provide some direction, I shared two open-ended story prompts (i.e., Prompt One: When you discuss your career change from student affairs with friends, family, and colleagues, where does your story begin? Prompt Two: Can you describe the critical events that took place for you between working in SA, leaving the field, and starting your new job?) (Appendix F).

During the first interview, I used an interview guide (Appendix F) to build rapport with the storytellers by briefly sharing my positionality and the purpose of the study. I then covered the consent form with the storytellers, reminding them they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time. I told the storytellers to think about their career change as a story we would work to identify, tell, and explore together in our conversations. Most importantly, I emphasized that there is no right or wrong way of sharing their career change story. Instead of a structured interview, I stressed a conversational approach where they could ask me questions, too.

The first interview with each storyteller lasted 90 minutes. I was nervous to use a loosely structured interview approach, worried that the storytellers might feel confused and that I might be underprepared. Out of precaution, I also generated and shared a list of topics and related questions with the storytellers in case the prompts failed (Appendix F). To my surprise, all

participants chose the first prompt to begin recounting their career change retrospectively. All but one storyteller spoke continuously for 90 minutes, with only brief pauses when I asked for clarification or elaboration. Consistent with Cohen and Mallon's (2001) observations, in the first interview, the storytellers structured their stories by sequencing events into a basic timeline (temporal context) and identifying the people and structures that influenced their decision to leave (social context). Specifically, to varying degrees, the storytellers discussed their early life and college experiences to situate their decision to pursue SA before highlighting their SA educational and career history and reasons for leaving SA. In the first interview, responses overemphasized the objective components of their career change (e.g., job titles, skills, key events, players, etc.). Some storytellers also had time to discuss their job search, entry into their new career role and context, and experiences in their new career during the first interview. Others continued their story in the second interview.

Second Interview

Before the second narrative interview, also conducted via Zoom, I sent storytellers a generated field text, a clean transcript, from their first interview to help them recall where they left off their story. The second interview required individualized protocols since each storyteller ended the first interview at different points. I wrote the protocols into two sections for each storyteller to bring together the objective and subjective components of the story.

The second interview lasted between 90–130 minutes. In the first section of the interview, I asked clarifying questions based on what was shared in the first interview to help draw out the subjective components of the storytellers' career change experience (e.g., emotions, needs, meanings, ambitions, contradictions, etc.). Since social and cultural narratives shape career transitions (Tomlinson et al., 2018), I also asked them to share whether their social

identities and contexts shaped their experiences and what motivated them to participate in Jeannie's panel series. In the second section of the interview, I prompted the storytellers to bring their stories to an end. I prepared guiding questions like the first interview, though we did not need them. Appendix G includes one of the individualized protocols for the second interview.

The second narrative interviews resulted in more subjective data, deepening the story from a CV account to career changes as something lived (Cohen & Mallon, 2001). The storytellers did not see their career change as an isolated event but as "an episode" in their "overall life/career story" (Cohen & Mallon, 2001, p. 55). Storytellers discussed the impact of their career change on their careers, lives, work meanings, satisfaction, and future goals.

Confidentiality

Since one data generation component included a publicly available YouTube playlist, I could not provide absolute anonymity to the storytellers. All storytellers agreed to participate in this study, knowing this design challenge. All except one storyteller were open to disclosing their career details. In addition to using pseudonyms, I promised to de-identify specific employer names, including the higher education institutions where they worked and their specific position titles. I instead reference their broader career field(s).

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I introduced my positionality and epistemology, which shaped my decision to study former SA professionals' career changes with a story methodology. I then detailed the story methodology used and introduced the research design, including the five storytellers selected for this study and their field texts. Building on this section, the next chapter describes how I analyzed and interpreted storyteller's field texts using a restorying approach and an interpretive framework of life course and SA-to-faculty career change perspectives.

CHAPTER 4: RESTORYING

Following the study's story methodology, this chapter details the restorying approach I used to interpret storytellers' field texts. Through restorying an interpretive framework emerged. I detail how life course perspectives arose from and informed the storytellers' stories.

Analyzing and Interpreting Stories

Like data generation, narrative analysis includes countless approaches that share a common focus on interpreting stories (Nasheeda et al., 2019; Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002; Smith, 2016). Overwhelmed by possible approaches, I read exemplars of narrative analyses conducted by my colleagues, such as Estera's (2020) Indigenous and narrative-inspired (Wilson, 2008) re-storying of Filipinx's decolonial sensemaking and Hall's (2021) narrative analysis (Polkinghorne, 1995) of Black undocumented college students' experiences. Although different study designs, these dissertation exemplars guided me to a restorying approach.

Restorying refers to the organization and analysis of the data, or field texts, for critical elements (e.g., contexts, actors, sequences, etc.), which researchers reconstitute into research texts (stories) (Ollerenshaw & Crendshaw, 2002). Narrative inquiry scholars offered me additional key insights for restorying. I collaborated with the storytellers by including them in the restorying process to limit the distance between how the story was told and interpreted (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Nasheeda et al., 2019; Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002). Finally, in my restorying process, I flirted with data, which Kim (2016) explained as:

> [A]n attempt to analyze and interpret the research data to exploit the idea of surprise and curiosity, as we don't know what is going to…emerge until we deal with data; it creates a space for us where we can discover ways to reach and negotiate our research aims with data; it encourages us to make time to embrace less familiar possibilities. (p. 187)

As such, analysis entailed surprise, curiosity, and intuition.

Data Transcription and Organization

To begin restorying, I transcribed and organized the field texts during the data generation process as the early field texts helped the storytellers and me prepare for the final interview. I transcribed and edited the secondary data and first interviews to build familiarity with the data. I thought of "transcription as part of the analytic process" (Smith, 2016, p. 215). For instance, I jotted notes in my researcher journal during the transcription process to identify surprising, expected, and crucial elements of the stories, including those I wanted to explore further in the second interview with storytellers. In the end, I generated 329 pages of field texts from all storytellers, which reflected an average of three-and-a-half hours of audio from each storyteller. I organized the field texts as files in a computer folder with sub-folders for each storyteller. To ensure collaboration, I sent storytellers their secondary data and interview transcripts after the first interview and asked them to review the texts for accuracy and confidentiality. All storytellers reviewed these materials, and only two asked for further masking and editing.

Indwelling: Listening and Reading

After completing data generation and transcription, I next practiced indwelling, which "involves reading the data (for example, an interview transcript) several times whilst, if possible, listening to any recording and jotting down initial impressions" (Smith, 2016, p. 216). I read and listened to the field texts one storyteller at a time (i.e., Josephine, Andrew, etc.). After immersing myself in each storyteller's field texts, I turned to my research journal to write about the stories that were emerging and resonating with me. During this process, I began to form initial interpretations of the texts, such as the role their social identities, relationships, and physical contexts played in their transition, their motivations for the change, and their reported transition

outcomes. I documented my initial interpretations and identified parts where I needed more elaboration using the comments feature in the Word file of each final interview transcript.

As a reminder, restorying involves collaboration to co-construct stories. As such, I sent storytellers their final interview transcript and asked them to spend 30 minutes responding to my initial interpretations and lingering questions. Speaking on this approach, Clandinin (2006) wrote, "This leaving of the field and return to the field may occur and reoccur…as inquirers compose research texts, negotiate them with participants…and recompose research texts" (p. 48). Josephine, Andrew, and Danilo responded to me with their comments, such as whether they agreed or disagreed with my interpretations or if they had additional insights to share. I did not hear back from Veronica and Ash about the final interview transcripts or my interpretations.

In response to the two missing participant replies, Dr. Gonzales wrote, "This is also an act of agency on the participants' part—their ability to say no or to not even acknowledge the request" (personal communication, January 3, 2024). Dr. Gonzales' comment pushed me to engage in researcher reflexivity. As a novice scholar, I wanted to follow the "rules" of qualitative research to persuade readers of study trustworthiness even though I knew such an aim is not unproblematic (Carlson, 2010). Like Hallett (2013), I "began my study more worried about validity than the participant[s]" (p. 37). By shifting my gaze away from issues of trustworthiness, which inherently prioritize the needs of the study and researcher, I could consider the needs of Veronica and Ash (Hallett, 2013). Perhaps they did not respond because I continually asked them to participate and give back so much to this study. Perhaps reliving a significant career decision and transition was difficult. In the end, I respected their right not to engage further.

Restorying: Writing as a Method of Inquiry

After reaching out to the storytellers, I continued restorying, remembering that analysis involves curiosity and surprise (Kim, 2016). To structure my restorying, I adopted "writing as a method of inquiry" (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 959)—a mode of inquiry that uses the very act of writing to make sense of the data as analysis emerges during the writing process. Describing the role of writing in a narrative analysis, Smith (2016) stated:

> As you jot down notes, write memos, edit your report and so on through the entire research process, you can progressively discover ideas, what counts, and how stories 'hang together'. Think of writing as an iterative and inductive process of hearing stories speak to the research aims, representing those stories and theoretical thoughts in writing, revising your selection of stories and theory as you develop your arguments and revising the writing as those stories and theory require (Frank, 2012). (p. 215–216)

In the initial absence of a theory, writing up the storytellers' field texts intuitively helped me explore and grow familiar with the ways the storytellers experienced their career change.

To prepare my writing, I reorganized each storytellers' field texts into a large outline based on narrative themes (patterns within sets of stories) and form (how they structured the story) (Smith, 2016). I intuitively grouped smaller stories from across the storyteller's field texts based on inductive themes, such as early life needs and values, turning points, and resources. Next, I mapped the inductive themes based on their timing in storytellers' life trajectory and elements of the career change process storytellers used to structure their story, such as entry into SA, leaving SA, and post-transition. While Tables 2–6 present a glimpse of the outline process for Josephine, the complete outline was messier and organized in a Word file. Lastly, the outlines allowed me to compare storytellers' field texts across their transition for whether meanings about

Table 2

Restorying Josephine's Field Texts Based on an Inductive Theme and Form: Career Needs and Values

Josephine	Childhood	College	Entry into Student Affairs	Student Affairs Graduate Program	Student Affairs Career	Transition Activity
Theme: Career Needs and Values	Interview 1: "I grew up in the hood." "I grew up on government assistance." "I never want to be in a position where that is going to be a possibility for my reality."	Interview 1: "No one in my house had…been to college." "I went through college not having any idea of what I wanted to do after, and I ended up falling into being an RA."	Interview 1: "I was a loner. I was like, 'How am I going to make friends?' "[The Resident Assistant role was] a natural way to do it." "Safety, security, consistency. [In my first full-time ResLife job], I had a roof over my head. I had a place that my mom could come and, like, stay the night if she wanted to."	Interview 1: "I came out literally the first weekend I was in [graduate school]." "And, I was like, "Okay, this field seems like open enough that I can explore [my Queer identity] …like this feels safe, and I want to be able to provide that and be a part of that for students coming in."	Interview 1: "It was like this is the career thing. 'Okay, I'm going to be this thing called student affairs, and I'm going to'…Honestly, I was like, 'I'm going to be a ResLifer to the end.'" Interview 2: "I was trying to get more money. I was trying to get different access."	Interview 1: "[What kept me from leaving SA was] the fear …the idea of leaving a consistent, comfortable, steady [job]. …You hear about layoffs or recessions, but that generally doesn't happen on a college campus."

Table 3

Restorying Josephine's Field Texts Based on an Inductive Theme and Form: Turning Point(s)

Josephine	Student Affairs Career Trajectory					
	Entry into SA			Life in SA and Transition Activity		
	College	1st SA Job	Graduate School	2nd & 3rd SA Jobs	4th & 5th SA Jobs	6th to 8th (Final) SA Jobs
Theme: Turning Point(s)	Interview 1: "I didn't know. So that's where my previous supervisor was, like, 'You should look into this as a field,' and I was like, 'Girl, where? Like, how does that happen.' And then I saw [an ad for my first ResLife job] in…when they used to do the Chronicle on paper."	Interview 1: "And I didn't start, I didn't even think about [SA] grad school until two of the folks that I was working with, one Hall Coordinator, and I think maybe a Chief of Staff."	Interview 1: "Everywhere that I interviewed, I got an offer. …I would like to think that I'm just that good. And I was like, 'Yeah, no, I was a Black face.'"	Interview 1: "I ended up meeting another mentor." "She was the person that I could see that… "Oh people leave student affairs, and they get jobs." "I don't want to feel bored at work."	Interview 1: "[The mentor] had transitioned out of higher ed and into HR." "She was the prompt [into]…my last role in ResLife into that HR specialist role." YouTube: "I had a very small stint doing some HR work in housing."	Interview 1: "I was somewhere in housing. And then [the WOC VPSA] eventually… offered [me a job]." "I was an Assistant Dean and Director of Student Conduct. Hated it. …I had students come in and break stuff in my office." "We had an opening at the Dean of Students…It literally confirmed…I don't want to do student affairs work anymore. …that was part of the technical catalyst for me [to change careers]." Interview 2: "When I was under the VPSA, my HR stuff never went away." "I was always going to leave, there was no question."

Table 4

Restorying Josephine's Field Texts Based on an Inductive Theme and Form: The Resources

Josephine	Transition Activity		
	4th & 5th SA Jobs	**6th to 8th SA Jobs for VPSA**	**New Workplace**
Theme: Resources	Interview 1: "The Associate Director of ResLife left to go work on the business side. I was like, 'You need me. I want to eventually transition to HR. And you need help, right?'" Interview 2: I wasn't getting what I thought I was going to get in this HR specialist role [in housing]. And, so, I was talking to one of my mentors. I talk to her all the time. But I was, like, "This isn't it." And she's, like, "You're right. This isn't it."	YouTube: "One of my former students…is now a career coach…he changed [my resume] from a chronological to a functional, and I got three hits within two days." Interview 1: "There was a Vice President… that took me under her wing." "I was somewhere in housing… And then [the WOC VPSA] eventually… offered [me a job]." "I told the VPSA, 'I'm going to leave.' I told her, 'I started searching.'" "[The VPSA] knew that I was looking at other stuff. …[when I got this HR job] she was so excited for me." "It was such a good relationship." "I started to get closer to [my mentor]. … The more I start to see her introduce me to people who did other things…I was like, 'Oh, people do other stuff.'" Interview 2: "I don't remember how I found out about the [Expatriates of SA Facebook] group. …I was like, 'Oh, my God! People like me. I want to leave.'" "My campus paid for my PHR."	YouTube: "I think the [SA] skills that have been the most transferable are the ability to be a broken record because I find myself saying the same thing over again to people who have supervised for a long time but seemingly not supervised well." "No one calls me after 4:30, no one calls me on the weekend, I don't come back to work on Monday with a whole bunch of emails of people who have been working hard. …so that's been an amazing high and it really has helped me kind of figure out what balance looks like." Interview 2: "This woman gave me a recommendation [for the HR job] just on the strength of my mentor." "My first two big wins, they ended up with dollars in people's pockets." "It definitely has built confidence." "Confidence is probably the thing that I learned most, and relationship management, which was different than…higher ed."

Table 5

Restorying Josephine's Field Texts Based on an Inductive Theme and Form: The Constraints

Josephine	Transition Activity		
	4th & 5th SA Jobs	**6th to 8th SA Jobs for VPSA**	**New Workplace**
Theme: Constraints	Interview 1: The HR specialist position was a mess. … I mean there was money, but there wasn't buy-in from the executive director. Interview 2: "I searched outside [HE for a HR job], but I wasn't getting any connects. …I have this tiny bit of experience in an obscure kind of way."	Interview 1: "I was looking at other institutions because at that point that still felt like it was my only option." Interview 2: "If you're in higher ed, no one's really, my experience was that no one was talking about getting out. It was like higher ed or die. And, if you talked about leaving, then it was, like, 'You're not committed to students.'"	YouTube: "I didn't have a community there, so I asked my supervisor…who's a white woman, I said, 'I need you to introduce me to Black women who are in the nonprofit space so that I can find community.'" "Also just being a Black person in a workspace and half of my leadership team is older white women…that's a little bit tough and it feels uncomfortable right now." "We work in in a space that can be trauma inducing because we work with child abuse and families…" Interview 2 "At the time, it was a white lead, white woman led organization, which I knew going in. But then I realized I had only ever reported directly to one white woman before transitioning to the non-profit. The non-profit boss leaned so heavily into woman-ness and that was not my only lens. And, so it was, it was hard. It was, it certainly made me question if I should be there." "I was, like, what did I get myself into? Because I also took a pay cut for the transition. I was aware of that. My wife and I sat down. I was, like, 'Okay, how long can this pay cut,' it wasn't a significant pay cut. It was a pay cut nonetheless. Like, 'how long are you able to? Are we gonna be able to sustain this living where we currently live?'"

Table 6

Restorying Josephine's Field Texts Based on an Inductive Theme and Form: Exercising Agency

Josephine	Transition Activity	
	6th to 8th SA Jobs for VPSA	**New HR Career**
Theme: Exercising Agency	YouTube: "I had prepared for quite some time before that to both take a pay cut but then expect to be back where I was when I left higher ed, but I knew I needed to learn stuff and prove myself in a bit of a way." Interview 1: "I'm going to sign-up to take this prep course, to study for the PHR, the professional human resource." I'm gonna like really step my networking game up, get out there, and go to more of these mixers and stuff." Interview 2: "I was always going to leave, and there was no question. It was, like, 'I wonder if she is gonna go?' Yeah, I'm leaving. I just don't know exactly when. "I took a week off in between my last day [in SA] and starting this new one. …which doesn't seem like a lot of time, but to be able to not have a phone that's connected to your work and not have a laptop… That was the thing that I needed to be able to separate [from SA]."	YouTube: "I was so entrenched in higher education that I had to like just take the hat off all together and get something altogether new." "I remind folks that I coach now that are in higher ed, I'm like, 'They will be fine. I promise you they will be fine. But you will not be fine if you continue to like stay in the space where you are clearly unhappy.'" Interview 2: "I have a history, and I hope to continue advocating for myself on what I need and want. I know that I am in charge of asking for what I need in order to get safety." "I invite people who I have previously worked with [in SA] to train and do workshops. …And, I want to keep those connections going." "One of my primary reasons for wanting to represent on the [YouTube career change panel] was because I did not see that representation for me as I was 'growing up' in the [SA] field. I also am keenly aware of the narrative that surrounds Queer Black Women in society, and I have vowed to be that as much as I can." "So that was really the draw for me to be, like, 'I was able to do it. And, I had support in doing it.' And this is a way for me to give back to folx so they can see that it's possible."

their experiences were consistent, nuanced, or reduced between the three years that separated the secondary data and the interviews.

As I began to write up each storyteller's narrative themes and form, I remained aware of key ideas grounding my social constructionist stance: (1) individuals' knowledge about their careers is not neutral but shaped by their social identities and related power dynamics and (2) this knowledge is negotiated within their different social and physical settings, including the actors embedded in those settings (e.g., home, family, etc.). Finally, my story methodology reminded me to view career change as a dynamic experience concerned "with the change over time" in a beginning, middle, and end form (Cochran, 1990, p. 73). In this way, each story included individuals' salient social identities, contexts, and transition process. Lastly, I used my research question to analyze participants' specific descriptions of how they experienced the change, focusing on their perceived motivations, resources, constraints, and decisions.

Since the aim of narrative-based analysis is to generate stories as the research product (Polkinghorne, 1995), I decided to produce rich narrative findings by representing my analysis in individual stories versus a thematic analysis of all participants' stories. I exchanged an initial draft of findings (stories) with my chair and three peers. After discussing the initial findings, I followed my chair's advice to re-read the stories I had *re*presented and reflect on the questions the stories allowed me to answer inductively before identifying a framework and re-writing the findings accordingly. The next section details the framework that arose from these steps.

Interpretive Framework

Since careers are dynamic, subjective, and complex processes shaped by multiple individual and structural factors (Tomlinson et al., 2018), I initially struggled to identify a framework sensitive to the intricacies of career change. I often felt I was steering my dissertation

towards an unclear destination, constantly questioning my research question and desiring a theoretical safety net when restorying became unwieldy. Eventually, inductively (re)reading and writing up participants' stories helped me identify key ideas that then informed the development of a framework, which I later deductively applied to examine each story in more depth. This section details how life course perspectives shaped my remaining restorying efforts (Elder & Johnson, 2003; Elder et al., 2003; Fehring & Bessant, 2009; Giele & Elder, 1998).

Life Course

Social scientists use life course to study human development (Elder & Johnson, 2003; Giele & Elder, 1998). Arising out of sociology and now spanning across disciplines, fields, and cultural boundaries, life course is a "theoretical orientation that guides research on human lives within context" (Elder et al., 2003, p. 10). Life course explores people's lives through patterns of stability and change within their ever-changing and interconnected biographical (e.g., personal history), interpersonal (e.g., relationships), structural (e.g., organizational shifts), and historical (e.g., economic recessions, Covid-19) contexts (Elder & Johnson, 2003; Elder et al., 2003).

Though I came upon career change studies framed by life course early in my literature review, I dismissed this lens as I was not interested in examining career change based on the historical and structural times (e.g., labor market and policy factors) and places individuals lived through or from its timing in a person's life (Elder et al., 2003). Yet, in my inductive restorying, I noted that participants framed their transitions within the biographical (e.g., personal life and career histories) and social (e.g., work, family, community, etc.) contexts of their lives. This insight pushed me to revisit career change studies framed by life course. I reevaluated a life course lens given Howes and Goodman-Delahunty's (2014) study exemplar, in which they wrote, "Many approaches to using…life course…to examine career change are possible; we

presented but one" (p. 19). This quote assured me that even though I was not prioritizing macro analysis, I could use life course to center early life histories, social contexts, and individual agency emphasized by the storytellers. Below, I cover the three life course principles that guided my sensemaking of former student affairs (SA) professionals' career change.

Dynamic Lives: Trajectories, Turning Points, and Transitions

Life course recognizes that lives are lived dynamically and helps examine processes of transformation (Elder et al., 2003; Zittoun, 2009), such as career change (e.g., Preoteasa, 2021). Three life course concepts used to study the dynamic nature of change include trajectories (the overall direction of a person's life and career shaped by sequences of long-term change and stability, often including transitions), transitions (specific changes between different roles and stages within a person's life trajectory), and turning points (critical objective or subjective moments altering a person's trajectory) (Elder et al., 2001; Fehring & Bessant, 2009). In this respect, career changes "constitute 'transitions' while 'careers' are the trajectories within which [career] shifts or transitions occur (George, 1993)" (Fehring & Bessant, 2009, p. 4).

To understand participants' career change, I approached participants' life trajectory as the context within which individuals' career change took place. I wrote up key elements of participants' biographical histories and career change process by chronologically ordering events, including the "periods of routine" preceding and following the transition from SA (Howes & Goodman-Delahunty, 2014, p. 64). Storytellers' transitions followed key turning points (e.g., events, actors, and beliefs). Turning points did not always "directly produce change; rather they trigger[ed] personal explorations and trial experimentation," which later led to career change (Ibarra, 2006, p. 6). Finally, I connected these turning points to storytellers' long-held

career needs and values (e.g., safety), as indicated by their early life experiences (e.g., childhood poverty), to identify the motives for their change and career decision-making.

Linked Lives and Social Contexts

I also drew on the two closely related life course principles of linked lives and social contexts. The principle of linked lives emphasizes that human lives and trajectories unfold interdependently with people, social groups (e.g., friends, career networks, etc.), and society (Elder et al., 2003; Fehring & Bessant, 2009). Further, the principle of social contexts suggests that a wide array of social contexts, such as family, school, community, and professional networks, influence individuals' career trajectories and decisions towards specific socio-cultural pathways through different practices (Tomlinson et al., 2018; Zacher & Froidevaux, 2021). Combined, these principles suggest that the social and physical settings (e.g., SA workplace) and the roles, behaviors, and decisions of actors embedded in these spaces (e.g., mentors, online groups, etc.) can limit or aid "one's capacity for acquiring new abilities" or "perceptions of potential future opportunities" (Preoteasa, 2021, p. 38). By focusing on these principles, I identified the social contexts (e.g., the SA workplace, family, community, and new workplaces) and the actors within those contexts that shaped individuals' career change experience in terms of constraints and resources. For instance, some of the storytellers experienced career change through their linked lives with mentors, who provided resources like job leads.

Agency

Another key principle of life course is agency (Elder et al., 2003). This principle asserts that individuals "are not passively acted upon by social influence and structural constraints" (Elder et al., 2003, p. 29). Instead, individuals engage in self-determination, modifying their life trajectories through their decisions and actions in response to the constraints and resources of

their social contexts (e.g., home, peer networks; Elder et al., 2003). Indeed, scholarship reports personal meanings, job (dis)satisfaction, skills, emotions, self-efficacy, and self-conceptions as individual drivers of career change (Brazier et al., 2024; Hoyer & Steyaert, 2015; Masdonati et al., 2017; Muja & Appelbaum, 2012; Wanberg & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2008). Attending to individuals' decisions and actions helped me consider their strategies for change. For instance, most storytellers carefully planned their exits before leaving SA.

Merging Principles

Altogether, the above life course principles imply that multiple factors explain how individuals experience a career change. Inspired by Preoteasa's (2021) life course study of career changes into the IT field, I conceptualized career change as a dynamic process shaped by a person's early life and career trajectory and the interplay between an individual's decisions and external settings, e.g., family, work, communities, etc. This also meant that constraints and resources within a person's external settings could shape their career change.

Restorying with Life Course Perspectives

Altogether, the life course perspectives evoked the following analytical questions: How do early life experiences shape storytellers' decisions to change careers? Which turning points in their SA career trajectory drove storytellers' career change? How did social contexts and actors, such as SA workplaces or colleagues, shape the career change experiences of former SA professionals? Which actions did storytellers take to shape their transition experience?

This interpretive framework led me to view each participant's story as a distinct trajectory, and, as such, I avoided presenting findings in homogeneous terms. I instead presented each storyteller's career change in individual findings chapters. Altogether, the following chapters offer a rich view into the career change experience as retold by each storyteller.

Trustworthiness

Throughout this study, I returned to Loh's (2012) questions for narrative-based researchers: "How valid and reliable is the collection of these 'stories,' and how can a story be valid as an analysis?" (p. 2). To ensure diverse readers, including those "interested in 'stories'" and "those who are not," that the data generation methods in this research are reliable and the interpretations drawn are of good quality, I adopted various trustworthiness strategies (Loh, 2013, p. 12). Trustworthiness is a way to measure qualitative research quality and contrasts the quantitative concepts of validity, reliability, and generalizability (Loh, 2013).

Altogether, I used the following trustworthiness strategies: (1) member checks, (2) expert debriefing, and (3) triangulation. First, for member checking, I requested each storyteller to review their field texts for accuracy (e.g., if they felt anything was left out, wrong, or could reveal their identity) and to review my initial interpretations of their data (McAlpine, 2016). Second, I asked three qualitative researchers and my advisor to read, question, and confirm the interpretations of the stories during the writing process. Finally, I employed triangulation by using multiple data sources from two different points in the storyteller's lives to corroborate their story and generate rich and detailed descriptions in the reported stories for readers to evaluate.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I discussed the restorying approach I used to analyze and write up the field texts into research texts before detailing the interpretive framework that emerged from and informed the study. The following five chapters present individual stories of career change, providing in-depth findings about each storyteller's transition experience. I encourage an anti-essentialist reading of the findings, inviting readers to view the stories as illustrative rather than the whole experience of changing careers for former student affairs professionals (Sallee, 2021).

CHAPTER 5: FINDING A MENTOR

"Find somebody who you can align yourself with."

As a Black Queer woman who experienced socioeconomic precarity in early childhood, Josephine desired a career that would meet her core needs for safety, security, and consistency. These core needs largely drove Josephine's decision to enter student affairs (SA) and, later, change careers. Additionally, early in her SA career, a chance encounter with a former SA professional, who later became her mentor, marked a critical turning point in Josephine's career trajectory, helping her realize people can leave SA and thrive. After this encounter, Josephine began to gradually map her exit from SA into a human resources (HR) career. Throughout her transition, Josephine's mentor helped her learn about HR careers, prepare for the exit from SA into HR, and adjust to the new HR career. Josephine's story is a testament to the power of mentorship in shaping a significant career change from SA.

Going into our first interview, I already knew from Josephine's YouTube panel interview that she had left an Interim Dean of Students position at a large public higher education (HE) institution for a small non-profit organization, where she continued to lead the human resources department. When I invited Josephine to share her career change story with me in our first meeting, she, like the other storytellers, started by detailing her early home and college years. Revisiting her time in college as a first-generation student, she recalled, "I went through college not…having any idea of what I wanted to do after." Josephine, a communication studies major, "fell into student affairs" through student employment and summer internships (e.g., residence life) and a mentoring relationship with the Director of Housing, which are common factors known to influence SA career choice (Ardoin, 2014; Brown, 1987; Taub & McEwen, 2006).

In this early part of her story, Josephine recalled entering the SA profession for a job and the financial resources it offered. In college and in her first SA job after graduation, working in Residence Life was a way to save on rent and meals and access experiences she had not grown up with, such as the ability to fly in a plane (across the country for a SA internship). "It was all new and exciting," she admitted. In those early years, Josephine did not see SA as a career, explaining, "[A student affairs career] wasn't really part of the language. So, I was like, 'Oh, I got a job.' I just happened to work on a college campus." Josephine's decision to go into SA paralleled her entry into young adulthood and was driven by her aspirations for safety, security, and consistency as a Black woman. "I had a roof over my head. I had a place that my mom could come and stay the night if she wanted to. Like, my own place. And I was living independently. …So, I was, like, 'I'm grown.'"

After working as a Residence Hall Director for two years with colleagues who had their master's in SA, Josephine shifted from seeing SA as a job to a career. Josephine explained:

> It was like [SA] is a career thing. 'Okay, I'm going to be this thing called student affairs, and I'm going to'… Honestly, I was like, 'I'm going to be a ResLifer to the end.' Like, rent what is that? I'm not paying that. So, I went into [my SA work] thinking this is my career. Like, when people say they worked at a job for 20–25 years, I'm like that's going to be me doing something in this field.

Josephine's pursuit of a SA career crystallized when she decided to pursue a graduate degree.

Graduate school, a period of significant sexual identity development, further helped Josephine see a SA career as a means for securing the safety, security, and consistency she longed for since childhood. Josephine's peer relationships in graduate school helped her safely explore and express her Queer sexual identity, an experience she linked to the SA field. "This

field seems open enough that I can explore [Queer identity] and do so [in a way that] feels safe. And I want to be able to provide that and be a part of that for students coming in." Josephine's perception of the SA field as inclusive in graduate school allowed her to safely form her Queer identity as a Black woman and motivated her to seek a SA career where she could foster similar inclusion for students. In addition to receiving safety for her sexual identity, Josephine also explained that her connections with the 20-plus peers in her graduate cohort left her hopeful about her lifelong career security. "I'll never not be able to find a job," she shared, explaining, "security and consistency are kind of my baseline feelings. I need to feel those."

Curious to know how these baseline feelings informed her career decisions, SA career, and eventual career change, I prompted Josephine to elaborate. She explained she "grew up in the hood" and her family periodically relied on government assistance. Those early years of socioeconomic precarity created a life-long fear. Josephine elaborated:

> It's a constant fear that I have. …I remember times when I had to do homework by candlelight, take a shower by candlelight, or powder milk was the milk that we drank. Terrible. …I never want to be in a position where that is going to be a possibility.

Josephine's initial years in SA fulfilled her childhood needs for safety, security, and consistency. So, what turning point(s) then led her to leave a SA career that seemingly met her core needs?

During Josephine's first post-graduate job as a Hall Director, long before her decision to part with SA, she met Colleen, a New Yorker with an accent and gravitas about her. Invited to speak about her career, including her exit from SA into human resources, Colleen visited the residence life department where Josephine worked. Colleen's visit marked a significant turning point in Josephine's career trajectory. "She was the person that I could see that I was, like, 'Oh, this is a possibility. Oh, people leave student affairs, and they get jobs.' …So, after the meeting I

was like, 'I need to know you.'" Although it would be years before Josephine exited SA, the meeting planted a seed that one's career could evolve beyond the SA field and marked the beginning of a relationship that would grow over time and offer support for the change to come.

In the years following her meeting with Colleen, Josephine underwent several transitions within SA, including job changes and promotions across different functional areas, professional levels, and HE institutions. In her early SA career, Josephine pursued career transitions to address challenges of boredom, tokenization, and a lack of culturally relevant mentorship she faced as a Black Queer woman. Later in her SA career, her transitions were driven by mid-level career opportunities, such as the ability to report to and be mentored by a Woman of Color (WOC) leader, promotions, and higher pay. Eventually, new challenges of workplace violence and work-life integration in her final SA roles reactivated her need for safety, security, and consistency, which she felt she could no longer gain from SA. Through her various SA transitions, Josephine held on to Colleen's example and experimented with paths out of SA with Colleen's mentorship. In the end, a combination of SA experiences and her evolving relationship with Colleen, her mentor, shaped her decision to leave the SA field for a HR career.

One key SA transition included moving from residence life to housing operations. Inspired by Colleen, Josephine crafted a career experiment for herself by pursuing HR work within SA. According to Ibarra (2002), the advantage of crafting experiments is that "we can try out new professional roles on a limited scale without compromising our current roles or having to leap into new positions too quickly" (p. 45). Josephine attributed her decision to Colleen's example. "She was kind of the prompt or pivot into…my last role in ResLife into that random HR specialist role that I made up." However, despite Josephine's goals, her HR experiment "was a mess." She faced a lack of support and buy-in from leadership. What she hoped would allow

her to prepare for a career change instead became just "moving around papers." "This isn't HR work," she recalled. Remembering her goals and eventual disappointment, she shared, "Oh, this is the next thing. This is going to be the thing that propels me. It wasn't." Josephine sought out Colleen's advice about her HR role during this time and both agreed, "This isn't it." While Colleen was encouraging Josephine to "look outside" of HE, Josephine's attempts to search outside were largely unsuccessful due to a lack of connections. "It just wasn't happening and that makes sense. I have this tiny bit of experience in an obscure kind of way."

Though her career experiment in HR was thwarted, around this time, she began to gain culturally relevant mentoring she lacked in her early SA career. When a WOC joined campus as the VPSA (Vice President of Student Affairs), Josephine emailed her even though she "was somewhere in housing" "several rungs below her in terms of reporting line." She was drawn to this VPSA because "she's a Woman of Color," who she felt was going to "get some shit done" and "trusted and respected." Eventually, the VPSA asked her, "How would you feel about working in the Dean of Students' office?" to which Josephine responded, "'Doing what?'…I didn't even know what that meant because my experience is you're in housing. That's what you do. You do residence life." Suddenly, Josephine realized she was not resigned to a SA career in residence life, and she could move into different areas of SA. Indeed, Holmes (1982), long ago, recognized the "many possible career steps open to the student affairs administrator" and their "considerable movement" across SA functional areas (Holmes, 1982, p. 29).

The job opportunity presented by the WOC VPSA helped stave off Josephine's turnover from SA for a couple of years and served as a valuable transition into a new functional area of SA. This transition, unlike her past transitions in residence life across different HE institutions, proved even more instrumental in preparing Josephine for her eventual career change, while

meeting her needs for safety, security, and consistency in the short-term. Addressing this, Josephine shared that her "HR stuff never went away." "I always knew that I would pursue HR. It was a matter of when is the time going to happen? That was really the question. I was always going to leave. There was no question," she recalled. Plus, for the short term, the new SA role allowed her to leave her messy HR situation in housing operations for a pay increase and stability. "Yes, structure, order, consistency, and minimizing surprises. And that's what I wanted. So, for me there was stability and predictableness going into the role. I know what [the VPSA] expects. I know what she wants." Under the VPSA's supervision and mentorship, Josephine experienced three job promotions, flexibility, and pay increases.

Despite the VPSA's enduring efforts to retain and promote Josephine, mid-level SA work began to threaten Josephine's need for safety. Josephine was "lightweight stalked by a few students" while she was living on campus and students involved in conduct cases would "break stuff" in her office, mirroring Williams' (2019) finding that Black women leave SA in part due to workplace violence. Reflecting on this time, Josephine recalled losing sense of the confident person she was when she came to SA. She also felt she was working non-stop, including weekends, on vacations, and when she was with family. When her VSPA offered her another promotion to the Dean of Students role, she could only think about the "short shelf life on the people who are the Dean of Students because they keep leaving." She agreed to serve on an interim basis while her VPSA searched for a permanent replacement. Josephine's concerns about the stressful nature of the Dean of Students role were confirmed during her interim service.

Even as SA impacted her well-being and safety, Josephine held on out of "fear…around, number one, the unknown." The "idea of leaving a consistent, comfortable, [and] steady" SA career reactivated Josephine's fears about economic precarity. So, she continued to search for SA

jobs. “At that point, [searching for SA jobs] still felt like it was my only option,” she shared. In the end, the interim Dean role and its related job stress marked another career turning point for Josephine, helping her realize she no longer wanted to do SA work. She mentioned:

> I don’t want to do student affairs work anymore. And that was part of the technical catalyst for me. Okay, I’m going to sign-up to take this prep course and study for the PHR (professional human resource) exam. I’m going to really step my networking game up, get out there, and go to more of these mixers and stuff because I can’t do this.

With her VPSA’s support, Josephine used her HE organization’s employee benefits to enroll in a 12-week PHR certificate program. “I have a good way of hustling, so the university paid for it. I took a 12-week prep course, which meant I left work every Wednesday at 4.”

During this time, Josephine also “started to get closer to Colleen.” With Colleen’s help, she started to attend professional mixers and meet new professionals. Meeting professionals outside of SA helped her explore other career paths. “The more I start to see her introduce me to people who did other things besides student affairs, and I got out of this web of only student affairs, I was, like, ‘Oh, people do other stuff.’” In this respect, Ibarra (2002) also found that “a guiding figure” can help to “light the way and cushion the eventual leap” and that career change involved “networking outside of our usual circles” (p. 46). Eventually, Colleen shared an HR job opening at a small non-profit with Josephine. “She is the reason that I applied and knew about this job because I’d never heard about this organization before.” Colleen knew someone on the board of the non-profit who also supported Josephine during the application process. “This woman [on the board] gave me a recommendation just on the strength of my mentor. I had never talked to her. And, then things happened really quickly after that.” Colleen was there throughout the entire application and interview process, and Josephine eventually secured the role.

Colleen, of course, was not the sole source of support during Josephine's transition. Yet, she was the most prominently featured in Josephine's story. There was also the WOC VPSA who signed-off on Josephine's PHR prep course, served as her reference, and celebrated her when she got the job offer. There was also Josephine's former student who helped her rewrite her chronological resume into a functional resume. There were her mom's prayers and fierce championing. There was also her wife's steady encouragement, listening ear, and willingness to plan around a pay cut until Josephine could learn more and earn a promotion in her new HR role.

There was also the SA Expatriate Facebook group, an online space where Josephine drew support from other former and current SA professionals outside of Colleen. Josephine confessed:

> My experience was that no one was talking about getting out. It was higher education or die. If you talked about leaving, then it was 'Oh, you're not committed to students'…And that wasn't it. I needed to find a space where you could get out. People get out, people transition careers, or they come to higher education from different avenues.

So, when Josephine found the SA Expatriate Facebook group, she welcomed the space. Recalling her excitement, Josephine shared, "I was, like, 'Oh, my God!' People like me. I want to leave. I need to see people who've done it.'" Josephine realized many members in the Facebook group expressed a lot more fear about leaving SA than she did. "I did not have any fear. I had made my intentions known. My VPSA knew." Josephine was no longer afraid of leaving, unlike her early attempts when she still searched for SA jobs out of fear of the unknown.

After years of gradual planning, support from her VPSA, Colleen, family, and former student, networking, and completion of her PHR certificate, Josephine secured a HR job at a small non-profit. In the transition following her departure from SA, Josephine did not grieve her SA professional identity nor identify as an SA expatriate. She took a week off, which she

recalled being enough time for her to transition out of her SA professional identity. In transitioning to a HR role, she started to see her past SA professional identity as connected to a job rather than her sense of self, which is why she did not identify with the SA expatriate identity in digital spaces. She admitted:

> It feels weird to say expatriate… I know this has become some people's life and their identity… And I'm also like this is still a job. And maybe that's the thing that we're not seeing it as a job. … We're not becoming expatriates of anything. We're leaving a job. We might be leaving a field. But this is a job that you likely would not do for free.

In adjusting to her HR role, Josephine encountered several challenges. She remembered experiencing "imposture syndrome" for about a week until she "learned that no one knew what [she] was really supposed to be doing and so that gave [her] the freedom to learn [she] could make mistakes." Josephine also faced identity-related issues in her transition as was one of the few Black employees in a white woman led organization. She had only ever reported to one white woman in SA and her new supervisor, a white woman CEO, framed the organization's work with a lens of gender, leaving out the Black Queer lens Josephine brought with her. Plus, in consultation with her wife, Josephine took a pay cut and decided to advocate for her salary within a year's time, otherwise she would search for another HR job. Finally, her new organization's mission to support trauma survivors also took a toll on Josephine's well-being.

Through these various challenges, Josephine continued to lean on Colleen to build up her skills and ensure she could secure career success in the HR profession. Colleen had encouraged Josephine to work with her to improve her various HR competencies (i.e., how to administer benefits and ensure compliance). Colleen also provided Josephine with guiding questions that served as goal posts of career success. Remembering this, Josephine shared:

> She helped me zoom out and be like, 'What is it that you want to focus on? What are your three major focus areas?' And she really helped me drill down what I meant by those [focus areas] and how to actually do it so I felt some levels of success.

When Josephine struggled with various state and county HR compliance obligations and benefits calculations in her job, Colleen invited Josephine to her home to work these issues out over meals. Josephine appreciated Colleen's "high touch" approach and that she didn't just advise her to take a class. "Come over, bring the stuff, and I'll hold your hand through it," Josephine recalled Colleen saying. Colleen also helped Josephine advocate for greater pay. "I learned how to ask from Colleen. I learned how to figure out the questions to ask for not only the promotion, but like other pieces of work and learn how to not be taken advantage of."

Throughout her career reinvention, Josephine could count on Colleen's support. Over time, their relationship evolved into a reciprocal friendship. The evolution in their relationship is notable because it reflected the successful integration of the career change into Josephine's life, wherein she could now offer HR-related career support to Colleen. Josephine detailed how she now served as a listening ear when Colleen needed another HR professional to talk to about a work meltdown. Josephine also hosted Colleen at her work for speaking gigs. During the onset of Covid-19 pandemic, they both exchanged HR practices for navigating restrictions around vaccination policies. Filled with gratitude, Josephine remarked, "I had a person who had been doing this work for 20-some-odd years that was invested in my success. I know that she is." In addition to having Colleen's career as a roadmap for her career change, Josephine's decision to pursue HR is further affirmed in her relationship with Colleen, her now industry colleague. At the end of our first interview, Josephine was filled with appreciation and stated, "I am excited

to…when I hop off… I'll text her and be like, 'Oh, my god, I'm so grateful!' But just to remind her 'Remember when?' And we can have a laugh about it."

With Colleen's support, Josephine mastered new skills and achieved new feats in her HR career. In one such feat, she updated her new organization's entire 403B retirement plan to offer employees a higher percentage employer contribution at a lower cost to the organization. In another feat, she established hiring policies that have continued to be utilized in the organization. There have been many accomplishments, but these two helped build Josephine's "confidence" to manage "millions of dollars of other people's money," develop relationships with sponsors, and learn how to answer benefits-related questions. "The confidence is such a huge one because now I'm like, 'Okay, I got this.' People start to say, 'Oh, she knows what she's doing.'"

Josephine also disclosed that her professional experience in SA yielded transferable skills. For Josephine, the most valuable SA skills included being a "broken record…with people who have supervised for a long time but seemingly not supervised well" and "corralling information and building systems," such as writing organizational policies. With hindsight, she admitted she "probably wasn't qualified" for the HR job, but she had high "emotional intelligence" cultivated from years of SA work, which her CEO valued. In this respect, Josephine felt her SA career was "worth the time and investment" given the transferable skills she acquired. Further, the student development theories and inclusion narratives she learned in SA, particularly around Queerness, carried over into broader parts of her life and social relationships after the career change. She noted, "If I hadn't been in higher education and student affairs, I don't know that I would have had the confidence to be myself and out, and then to be able to share that with my little cousin, who's thinking that she's the only one who is masculine presenting."

Now, a few years into her HR career, Josephine appreciated the benefits of her career change. Working at a much smaller organization of 70 people compared to her past HE employers has allowed her to speed up decision-making. Plus, unlike the end of her journey in SA where she "exalted everyone else's opinion" of her, she has found her "self" again. Her work-life boundaries are also supported by her supervisor and team. Josephine explained:

> No one calls me after 4:30, no one calls me on the weekend. I don't come back to work on Monday with whole bunch of emails of people who have been working hard…so that's been an amazing high and it has helped me figure out what balance looks like.

Looking ahead at her career trajectory, Josephine felt she had numerous possibilities. Her career change helped her identify that she does need work to be hard to be meaningful, explaining, "Everything we do in work doesn't have to be hard. It's okay to do work that's not hard. And if it's hard, then you can leave. You can leave with or without a job." She valued her newfound ease and has shifted her sense of work away from ideas of hard work. "At some point, I want a soft work life." For Josephine, a soft work life, like the one in her new HR role, gave her the chance to "leave work at work physically, mentally, [and] psychologically."

Given Colleen's support for her career change, it has been important for Josephine to similarly mentor others and "give back." This desire to give back is also shaped by her "upbringing in the Black church," which taught her to "make it easier for the next 'Josephine' to come up in the world" and her early childhood context "growing up poor and being on food stamps." Giving back "matters deeply because Black women, queer or otherwise, are and have been historically treated so poorly and overlooked. I know that I can change the world in tiny ways by pouring into us as others have poured into me," she explained.

To give back, Josephine has worked as a career coach since leaving SA, serving young Black women and Women of Color professionals. Further, she participated in Jeannie's YouTube panel series on career change to ensure visibility of a Black Queer woman's perspective, which she felt was limited in SA career discussions. She also was motivated to participate in the panel series to "contribute to something that not a lot of folks may be talking about or at least not talking about openly." Plus, she felt positive stories on the transition from SA into the non-profit sector were limited in the SA Expatriates Facebook group as well as mentions of "how they actually did it" and "what was useful from their time in higher education to whatever their career move was." In her efforts to aid others, Josephine normalized the tension professionals may feel in reinventing their careers. In Jeannie's YouTube panel for current SA professionals considering a career change, Josephine reminded attendees:

> There's a point at which you will move through the 'they need me' [narrative]. They will replace you in your role. They will replace the role. They cannot replace you as a person but know that there is a space outside of education that is waiting for you. They will be fine. They will pay somebody else to do the job. Your students will be fine. So, I remind folx that I coach now…I promise, you will be fine. But you will not be fine if you continue to stay in the space where you are clearly unhappy.

Josephine's Career Change Summary

Josephine's positionality as a Black Queer woman, who endured economic precarity in early home life, drove her to seek safety, security, and stability from her career. Initially, her SA career met these needs, even allowing her to form her Queer identity safely. Yet, after a series of promotions, SA safety and work-life integration issues grew to conflict with her needs. In turn, she enacted her agency by planning her transition into an HR career to restore her core needs.

Specifically, two critical turning points shifted Josephine's career trajectory from SA to HR. Years before her transition, a chance meeting with a future mentor introduced her to the possibility of leaving SA for alternative careers, marking her first turning point and underscoring the importance of linked lives in the transition experience. A second turning point, an appointment to an Interim Dean role, confirmed her concerns about work-life integration issues in senior-level SA roles and her decision to reinvent her career.

Following these turning points, Josephine exercised her agency to support her transition. She "hustled" to gain her HR certification, leveraging her HE employer's resources and her SA supervisor's support. Josephine also sought transition success stories, job leads, and financial support from SA, home, online, and professional networks. Once in her new HR role, she took proactive actions, such as identifying her new career goals, seeking advice, and accomplishing significant benefits and policy tasks, which helped her grow confident in her new career.

Josephine's relationship with her mentor, Colleen, was central to her career change, highlighting the significance of linked lives in shaping individual career trajectories. Indeed, other actors, like her WOC VPSA supervisor, wife, mom, and former student, also positively shaped Josephine's career change. Yet, Colleen offered support before, during, and after the transition. During this period of reinvention, Josephine saw Colleen as a guide, someone who had been where she had been and could understand where she was going (Ibarra, 2002).

Relatedly, the SA workplace aided Josephine's transition, offering her critical resources to help manage the change. For instance, Josephine met Colleen while working in SA, indicating that relationships formed within the SA field can inform decisions to change careers. Plus, the SA workplace allowed her to craft a career experiment and explore an HR role. Josephine also had a supportive WOC supervisor in her final SA role who signed off on her institutional course

and schedule release, allowing her to use her HE employer's free tuition benefits to help her pivot. Finally, even after exiting SA, Josephine used the transferable skills she gained from SA to navigate her new career and live proudly as a Black Queer Woman.

The SA profession also imposed constraints, hindering Josephine's transition. Aside from her mentor's example, Josephine was riddled with "fear" as there were so few in-person and online examples of people who had managed to leave SA. In turn, after she left SA, Josephine exercised her agency to be a catalyst for others weighing change, particularly Black women.

Like SA, her new non-profit workplace also presented constraints and resources. As a Black Queer woman, she faced a culture of whiteness as the only Black employee at her non-profit organization. Simultaneously, she enjoyed greater work-life integration than SA. Altogether, Josephine's story highlighted how a critical mentoring relationship formed in SA helped bolster her decision to re-establish her needs for safety, security, and consistency as a Black Queer woman in the workplace by departing SA for an HR career.

CHAPTER 6: LEAVING FOR A WHILE

"How do I make a career safe?"

This next story is about how a career adopted out of compromise due to core needs was reinvented. Like Josephine, Andrew, a white gay man, experienced childhood instability and, in turn, desired stability, predictability, and support. These core needs shaped his career decision-making. In early life, his positive associations with school and activists left him seeking a faculty career where he could better the world. However, in college, discouraged by his professors and faculty career risks, Andrew instead pursued a SA career knowing it would not be a lifelong path for him. SA mentors, who supported Andrew's identity development as a white gay man and addressed his core needs by laying out a predictable career, inspired his SA career choice. Yet, Andrew's SA career was cut shorter than he envisioned. Two successive turning points, namely an unwelcome human resources policy followed by his growing belief he was not doing meaningful work to better the world, sparked his transition. Andrew's decision to leave SA led him to a global non-profit with a social change mission he valued. Eventually, his work in a adjacent role guided his return to HE for the faculty career he had always imagined, one he continued to navigate when we met for this study.

Andrew, like Josephine, started his career change story in a linear fashion, beginning with his early childhood—the unstable home he grew up in, the schools that provided him stability, and the friends whose parents inspired his activistic inclinations. Among all the participants in this study, Andrew spent the greatest amount of time covering his early life to explain "why student affairs was even appealing in the first place." "I just grew up in a very chaotic environment," said Andrew. He remembered his parents being "too young to have children" and being "incapable of meeting the needs of their children." He faced significant transitions in his

early life, including his parents' divorce at the age of nine, his mother's frequent hospitalizations for mental health issues, the transition from a rural town to a city after his parents' divorce, and his coming out process as a gay teen. "Home was not a place of support or security or being able to talk to them about things like a career," he recalled.

Unlike home, school offered significant stability, predictability, and support, which influenced Andrew's decision-making, including his career choices. "School was kind of the escape and the stable place for me throughout my whole life." He added, "Now with the benefit of hindsight, I can say, 'Oh, yeah, that really makes sense that I latched on to school as this place with rules and predictability and some mostly continuous support.'" Andrew attributed his ability to succeed in early education to his positionality as a white student who benefitted from a robust public school system. School also shaped Andrew's coming out process. In school, he felt every good grade helped secure his future through college, giving him the ability to leave his chaotic home, and find the queer community and inclusion he yearned for as a white gay teen.

In high school, Andrew grew aware of "faculty as a job," a career that resurfaced throughout his story. He explained, "It was like I know I like school, and for all these social emotional reasons, I want school. I was like, 'Okay, I guess maybe I'll do that,' and just thought I would be either an academic or a politician." Around this time, Andrew's friends had baby boomer parents who imparted to him the activistic values of the 1960s. From them he learned about "political activism as a cultural identity," and he increasingly "wanted to do something where [he] could read and write and that was making the world a better place." This desire to better the world, in addition to wanting stability, predictability, and support, has directed Andrew's career decision-making since his early life and factored into his career change.

Interestingly, in weighing colleges, his primary search criterion was unrelated to careers and instead centered on his hopes to locate a college that would allow him to access a Queer community he lacked growing up. “I knew I needed to get away from my family… because of all that chaos at home, I never really got a chance to process being Queer.” Only after starting college did the pressure to identify a career that would mirror the stability, support, and predictability he had found in schools and permit him to better the world take precedence.

Yet, there was tension in narrowing a career for himself given the national economy. The U.S. was facing the Great Recession, and his mother and stepfather were encouraging him to be pragmatic. Given how his early relationship with school met his core needs, he was drawn to philosophy and history majors. Yet, this choice was contested. Remembering this, he shared:

> That was a lot of pressure. There was this tension between doing what I wanted to do in the more humanity-based fields and being aware of and kind of beginning to, I think, internalize this narrative of those aren’t the fields where you go if you need a job after.

Ultimately, influenced by intertwining economic constraints and core needs, he determined a history and philosophy major was too “unpredictable,” choosing sociology instead.

He recalled taking an introductory sociology course, where he started to make sense of the various environments that had shaped his life. Filled with nostalgia, he explained:

> Whenever I hear that bell hook’s quote about coming to theory because you’re hurting or you don’t understand how you got somewhere like that sociology class is the first one where I realized, ‘Oh.’ It explained so much about what my experience is.

Yet, as his college years passed, the issue of identifying a career still loomed large as Andrew could not figure out what career paths sociology would allow. His sociology faculty discussed careers in marketing research, government, and data analytics but dissuaded students from

pursuing graduate studies. Andrew was conflicted as the faculty career goal that emerged from having his needs met through early schooling was seemingly at odds with those exact core needs. In response, he chose to double-major in environmental studies. “It was basically this thinking…the more credential I have the more…stability someday.”

While his classes were dissuading him from a faculty career, his co-curricular activities were setting the stage for an SA career. Andrew was a leader in an LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender) student organization involved in advocacy at a private religious university. His introduction to SA was not through a “smooth sailing experience” but through “conflict” between the LGBT student group, the institution’s religious identity, and its diversity office, which had historically ignored LGBT student concerns. When the student group hosted a drag show, it became the source of political conflict on campus, and Andrew quickly became exposed to SA staff. He recalled being one of the only student leaders who took “responsibility in some ways” and “liaise[d] with the [SA] staff.” Through a series of events that followed the drag show, including the termination of SA staff in the diversity office, he established close mentoring relationships with two new SA professionals who joined the university shortly after the campus conflict. These mentors helped him process the campus conflict, challenged him to consider his white identity, and offered him campus employment, including a role in the diversity office to launch LGBT student programs. Andrew recalled sticking around SA spaces through the conflict, which included difficult conversations with campus priests, because it contrasted the early home environment he was raised in. “I was like, ‘Oh, they are treating me like an adult, and even though we’re in conflict, people aren’t yelling at each other.’ …I had never seen that role modeled to me.” Through conflict, he felt security and agency in SA spaces that he lacked in his early childhood, and a sense that institutions could change.

Andrew also felt grateful to his mentors for investing in him during this period of conflict. So, when one of his mentors, the new advisor for the LGBT student group, told him that "Student affairs is a career. You can do this for a living if you would like," he started to consider it more concretely. He grew to admire his SA mentors. They were "some of the first people who [he'd] ever met that just got shit done," and he resolved that if he wanted to "learn how to be a competent person," these were the "people" to "follow." His mentors helped him realize he was "good in this crisis moment" and "nudged" him to try different SA activities. He took part in NASPA's (Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education) mentorship program, which promotes SA careers among students from marginalized backgrounds, and other campus student leadership roles. These opportunities helped him learn "there are a lot of career paths" in HE.

Over the course of his college tenure, working in SA became the "clearest option," solidifying slowly, whereas "everything else remained kind of nebulous." "There was a stability in having people around who put boundaries around the profession and were very clear about what it means to do the work," he explained, reiterating his need for stability. Andrew continued:

> I also still long-term knew I kind of wanted to be faculty, but those conversations around, 'Well, don't go into sociology graduate school unless you are really committed to it,' kind of scared me off. And I was like, 'Well, I'll do student affairs and this academic kind of lean and still be adjacent to and have access to academic work and academic life. And support it that way.' So, student affairs was a compromise for me.

Andrew also added that he did not plan to "be the person that stayed in [SA] for 30 years," and an SA career was a way to give himself time to figure out "what the path would be."

In hindsight, Andrew admitted his SA career was also born out of a desire to reciprocate his mentors' support for his development, the kind he lacked in his early life. He confided in me:

> If I'm being completely honest, maybe some indebtedness also. These people are doing something that's so unexpected, and so unusual, and where is the reciprocity in that? And, not fully understanding that maybe there are ways I could have done that [reciprocity] or similar things short of choosing the field.

Andrew also wished he had not rushed for the "stability" offered in an SA career. "I wish I would have just done something completely unrelated that was more of a nine to five," which his friends pursued after college, "trying different jobs" and "experimentation." "I didn't do any of that," he said with a hint of regret. His childhood needs for stability and predictability drew him into the SA career and away from experimentation. "Part of it is…you take high achieving folx…and you tell them, 'You could have this career that is, in some ways, very laid out. You don't have to worry about all this shit your classmates…are trying to figure out," he added.

Up till now, various actors and educational settings guided Andrew's SA career choice, even if only as a compromise. Instability in his early childhood left Andrew appreciative of the power of education to provide stability so much so that he considered a faculty career to address his core needs. Yet, his transition to college during a period of U.S. economic insecurity intersected with his history of childhood chaos to make him question a faculty path, especially when doubts about the academy were echoed by his faculty. Further, his new university setting and the SA professionals who worked there also introduced him to new possibilities in SA where he felt he could further the advocacy work he began as a white gay man. Andrew's career decisions reflected his early life needs and school relationships, like Josephine.

Andrew went on to receive his master's in student affairs, where he was introduced to new professional challenges. In his assistantship, his GA supervisor failed to provide structure, depended "unfairly" on Andrew and his graduate colleague to work beyond their 20-plus hours,

and enacted white fragility and microaggressions. Moreover, in his graduate classes, he observed a "politeness politics in SA" as some of his peers did not engage in critical readings of the profession or university. Concurrently, Andrew, who still considered going "straight through to a Ph.D.," took an academic issues course, he jokingly called, "The why you shouldn't be a faculty class." He recalled the class, much like his college sociology faculty, once again scared him away from a faculty career. "It hit home that there's always gonna be something that's dangled in front of you to do more than is probably healthy. … I took that to heart and was kind of afraid of graduate school because of that." So, Andrew continued with SA, hoping the challenges that surfaced in graduate school were an "anomaly."

However, his first full-time SA job, which would also be his last, helped him realize his concerns in graduate school were indeed not an anomaly, but symptomatic of the SA profession's foundations. After starting his SA career in leadership development, he recalled feeling "lucky" as he was in a "more balanced role (and one [he] really wanted) instead of residence life or orientation, where the time commitments and professional expectations felt even more unmanageable." Yet, soon after accepting this SA job at an elite private institution, he faced organizational "reorganization" and "chaos," which specifically included but was not limited to: a vacancy in his direct supervisory reporting line, employee turnover, mismanaged expectations for his entry-level role and budget responsibilities, rising responsibilities without support or adequate promotion, cycles of burnout, institutional leadership changes, institutional prestige seeking behaviors that made student programming with a predominantly wealthy white student body challenging, and a campus perception that SA professionals were "party planners." Andrew quickly realized the new position he was advertised during his interview process was "code for maybe no support," and, in response, he "slowly took it, absorbing it."

Amid the chaos, Andrew revamped a capstone leadership program, that students from white wealthy backgrounds had grown accustomed to treating as an honor's association, into a work-study opportunity. This "changed the demographics of who came in. It was much more diverse…students that were first gen or international students were able to work." In his SA role, he also sought teaching opportunities, as he still imagined a future in a faculty career. "Teaching felt like the most fun part of my job without worrying about the stress of event logistics, safety protocols, etc. Teaching was a reminder of why I was interested in the work in the first place." Initially, he recalled "doing okay with managing the changes, even though it wasn't fantastic."

As Andrew adjusted to the initial challenges of organizational chaos and prestige in his SA job, a human resources (HR) policy change marked a turning point in his SA career trajectory, leading him to consider other paths. Andrew's first turning point involved a "new personnel review system," which removed protections from his job and affected his pay and benefits. HR promised to reclassify Andrew's title to Assistant Director, but not before a three-month desk audit "where a woman from HR, followed [him], around the day to see what [he] actually did." Though this grueling audit led to a title bump and small pay increase, it also made him ineligible for overtime pay. "It was like, 'No, this was supposed to be a recognition of the work I was already doing. Not an excuse to give me even more work when you have employees commanding twice my salary doing nothing,'" he recounted. He felt he went through a "demoralizing process, to have [his] work judged of quality to the university" and they took away the one tool (i.e., overtime pay) that made him feel "fairly compensated for the amount of time [he] was putting in." This turning point was followed by a second turning point involving a subjective shift as Andrew told himself, "I'm not making the impact I want to make."

In response to the "HR related nonsense" and the "anger" that followed, Andrew was "driven to action" and started to weigh his options, once again revisiting a faculty career and a doctoral education. Yet, he still decided against an academic path because the tenured faculty mentor whom he met in college and hoped to work with had recently left academia. Instead, he applied to a "variety of jobs" in SA, non-profits, and for-profits. Since he was "somewhat" "managing" his SA work challenges, Andrew felt he did not need to get out in "this moment." So, he looked at jobs for a while and was "choosy." He also used the Student Affairs Expatriates Facebook group for "some confidence boosting that people do leave." "I just knew I wanted something different," he said. He initially applied to HR positions and a financial firm because of his leadership development background. It is notable that though Andrew continued to consider a faculty career, as evidenced by his teaching pursuits in his SA role, changes to his mentor's career thwarted his plans again, so much so that he considered leaving education altogether.

Eventually, his mentor, who had left academia, told Andrew about a facilitator role in a department supporting community colleges with organizational change, policy, and governance at a large global non-profit. With the job opportunity, Andrew hoped to improve upon his SA working conditions at an elite university. "I'll just completely shift gears really as much as you can within higher education and focus on a completely different type of institution and largely, a different type of student body," he thought. Ultimately, his SA experiences with organizational chaos helped him secure an adjacent role. "My supervisor told me after I got the job that I was hired because I understood first-hand what it feels to go through an organization that is changing. … So, using, what was a negative experience to my benefit was definitely how I found myself in this particular role." Here, Andrew's relationship with his previous faculty mentor and SA organizational chaos helped him leave campus-based work. Though Andrew moved into a

different type of work and role within the larger HE industry (Renn, 2004), he still perceived his transition to be a career change as he had to shift from a "bureaucratic" elite university campus to a non-profit "start-up" with a "flat" structure shaped by private funders.

During the transition, Andrew experienced a range of emotions (e.g., shock, anger) related to leaving SA. After securing his new job, he was "done, done" with his SA role and "quit" his "job two weeks before the school year started" even though in SA that is not "seen as a good thing" (e.g., Kortegast & Hamrick, 2009). "Upon leaving, I did feel a lot of sadness and guilt. I had people warn me about how hard student affairs was as a career since undergrad. I thought I could prepare myself for that and just push through," he said. Andrew elaborated on the toll the transition took on him, stating:

> Coming to terms with the fact that the career was making me so unhappy despite feeling prepared and competent was hard. In the worst moments, I felt like a failure. I felt I was letting my mentors down. …but I also knew I had been wronged by mismanagement of the organization. And I was receiving clear signals that this was the best I could hope for. I felt pushed into a corner where leaving, at least for a while, felt like the only choice.

Andrew continued to grieve SA even as he began his new role in the non-profit, where he enjoyed remote work, an increase in salary, flexibility in deadlines, promotion and advancement opportunities, and a nine-to-five schedule that was "less labor-intensive and less emotionally exhausting." Andrew grew to deeply value his work with community colleges. "It has been really incredibly rewarding to help professionals at community colleges who are doing the work of helping students persist and be retained at higher levels." Andrew also faced a new set of difficulties, which included: teaching himself about community colleges, managing a longer commute, unnecessary funder meetings, increasing work travel, adjusting to a non-profit "startup

mentality" of rapid growth, and being "naïve" to "philanthropy," particularly working with "people who have no experience of the things they're trying to change coming in and using their wealth to tell people who have lifetimes of experience what's wrong with them."

Andrew was in his new non-profit role when he decided to participate in Jeannie's YouTube series. Andrew believed online spaces, like Jeannie's panels, emerged because SA professional associations (e.g., NASPA and ACPA) prioritize the needs of managers and graduate programs over that of labor. Online discussions, reports about SA staff and faculty resignations during the Covid-19 pandemic (e.g., McClure, 2021; McClure & Taylor, 2023), and the departure of most of his master's colleagues from SA convinced Andrew of "something" "foundationally challenging about the way the [SA] field is set up." For Andrew, at least one of the issues is that the SA profession is tasked to reproduce itself while conducting its assigned work. Andrew explained that while there is a strong "branding apparatus" in SA that creates this "feeling there is a sense of identity in your work and being a part of a team," this also "creates tunnel vision." Of course, SA is not the only profession engaging in reproduction practices and processes. Suddaby and Muzio (2015) noted, professional occupations in general, like lawyers, economists, and museum curators, struggle to ensure their survival and autonomy.

Troubled by SA issues and "feeling a lot of freedom" after his transition, Andrew joined Jeannie's panel to let current SA professionals know about the important work of community colleges and that "there are other jobs that aren't tied to a specific college or university" and "to not be afraid to apply." Andrew delivered the following message:

> If you're committed…[to] the ideals of education and public education, and you had a similar experience to what I had of…the educational spaces in your life were really the

> only thing that kept you going and got you through childhood, there is work to be done, and it doesn't have to look like being an RA, supervising RAs, or planning orientation.

At the end of the YouTube panel, Andrew also shared how his non-profit work helped him clarify his desire to return to HE for a doctoral education and faculty career. Andrew noted:

> This [adjacent] role actually gave me the confidence to do that…having this job and seeing this big expansive space of non-profits, researchers, philanthropies that are trying to better understand what is happening in education and impact positive change. I know there's a space to go back to that's not student affairs if the faculty route doesn't work out for whatever reason.

Andrew finally committed to the faculty career he saw for himself in high school after learning he had options beyond campus-based work if a faculty path did not work out for him.

In returning to HE for doctoral studies, Andrew ensured stability for himself by securing some material and psychological safety in the form of an assistantship and supportive faculty. Yet, he struggled to find social safety. As a doctoral student, he realized the "promise of an academic community is a bit overblown," and, in turn, he hoped to view "faculty life as just a job." Specifically, he hoped to separate his core needs from his pursuit of a faculty career. In "hitting" "hard points" of graduate school, he struggled to "balance the need to support himself" against "this deep feeling that so much of the economy is exploitative and harmful and accelerating climate change." Andrew no longer wanted to "sacrifice building [his] own communities outside of work," even if it required forgoing a faculty career because he refused to seek jobs in conservative U.S. states, like Texas, as a white gay man.

Further, compared to SA, Andrew found a faculty career path less clear, explaining:

> It's funny how even though they're working in the same environment, the career of being a faculty is the antithesis of the way that student affairs is constructed. There are clear [SA] pathways, competencies are laid out, and we try to reduce as much ambiguity as possible. I think trying to be a faculty member has or like modelling my career path in that vein has been unlearning a lot of the SA career.

Andrew knew the linearity and competencies offered in an SA career are critiqued as "neoliberal technology…a tool to control people." Still, he added, "I really wrestle with that because of my background. It is very comforting to have that structure and stability."

To ease his concerns, he told himself at least he knew what was "not working about education" relative to other industries. He also tried to remember the joy he felt in his adjacent work as a third-party unbeholden to a HE organization. In that work, he spoke to power by studying the experiences of community college staff and directing insights towards college leaders who were obstructing change. Indeed, this work reignited his pursuit of a faculty career because "uncovering deeper issues…that aren't working" is "kind of the expectation" for faculty.

As he ended his story, Andrew wondered how to make a faculty career "safe." Through successive career transitions, he realized "how much [he] bought into this narrative that higher education prestige equaled stability and quality. …where you don't have to worry about getting a job." He refused to go to a "corporate place" and "enrich Jeff Bezos," like some of his former SA colleagues. And still, he questioned the education route, stating, "if it's not education or something similar, like a non-profit space, what is it going to be and how?" He relayed his career goals with a John Cusack monologue from the film, *Say Anything*, concluding, "'I don't want to sell anything, buy anything, or process anything as a career.'"

Andrew's Career Change Summary

Andrew's positionality as a white gay man who experienced childhood instability shaped his core needs for stability, predictability, and support. His career change and related decisions primarily reflected his core needs. Early in his life, positive encounters with school and activists drew Andrew to a faculty career through which he hoped to better the world and meet his needs. However, interactions with family and professors, who deterred him from a faculty career, and SA professionals during college redirected Andrew's career trajectory towards SA, a powerful example of linked lives. Andrew chose a SA career as a short-term "compromise" until he could figure out another path, preferably in academia.

Unlike the other storytellers, Andrew anticipated his eventual career change from SA before he entered the SA profession. However, he did not expect the change to occur so early in his SA career. In his first SA job, he experienced two turning points that prompted his transition. First, his employer's new HR personnel review policy eliminated the overtime benefits that offered him stability and support. While the first turning point was objective, the second was subjective. Following the HR policy change, Andrew began to question his SA role at an elite, prestige-seeking institution with predominantly white and wealthy students and whether his SA role aligned with his previous desire to make a meaningful impact on the world.

Andrew exercised his agency to reinvent his career after these two turning points. Like Josephine, he, too, planned his exit from SA. Driven by his core needs, Andrew cast a wide net, exploring non-profit and for-profit jobs in organizations within and outside of HE.

Andrew's career change also involved various kinds of resources he formed in SA. During his job search, the SA Expatriates Facebook group gave him confidence he could find

opportunities outside of SA. Further, his previous mentor, who also left academia, provided him with a job lead that turned into a new career opportunity in an adjacent non-profit organization.

Andrew's career change experience also included constraints. In his effort to exit SA, he momentarily revisited his previous faculty career goals but was deterred again by the timing of his mentor's departure from the academy. Additionally, even though Andrew spent the least amount of time in SA compared to the other storytellers, he still felt intense emotions of anger, sadness, and shame after his departure. Andrew explained how his feelings primarily stemmed from relationships he had formed with SA mentors. By leaving, he felt he was letting down his mentors. Andrew's SA mentors warned him of SA career challenges. He viewed his exit as an individual failure when he left. Andrew's emotional reaction also reflected his realization that his initial belief in stability, predictability, and support in SA was no longer possible for him.

Eventually, he started to feel reinvigorated by his adjacent work despite constraints posed by wealthy donors and colleagues who did not know much about HE. He found that his time spent in SA dealing with organizational chaos translated into his efforts to support community colleges with organizational change. The non-profit role also allowed him to process his departure from SA and restore his well-being. His new role as a third-party facilitator helped him develop his organizational policy and change skills. Feeling agentic, he, like Josephine, contributed to online discussions about exiting SA for a career change.

As he grew his skills and collaborated with researchers, Andrew realized he could be successful in a faculty role, which he had previously been scared away from by faculty, classes, and family. Most importantly, by leaving campus-based work, he learned he had options in adjacent and non-profit sectors, which he could always fall back on if the faculty career did not

work out for him. Knowing he had other options relieved the tension between his desire to seek a faculty career with all its perceived risks and still ensuring his core needs.

Altogether, Andrew experienced career change by leaving campus-based SA work for an adjacent role before pursuing a faculty career, complicating the SA-to-faculty career change studies of SA professionals who move directly into faculty careers (Guillaume et al., 2020; Martinez et al., 2020). Plus, even as a doctoral student, Andrew's desire for a faculty career is tempered by his concerns about stability, predictability, and support, namely his desire to find faculty work in inclusive geographic regions as a white gay man. Andrew realized that most educational career paths are complex through his career changes. As such, he hoped to make a faculty career safe, including seeing it as a job and not the sole source of his core needs. To this end, he also prepared himself to forgo a faculty career if it jeopardized his core needs.

CHAPTER 7: TRANSITIONING THROUGH VALUES

"I put myself in a place where I really wanted to do values-based work."

This story highlighted how career change is experienced through values of justice, service, and well-being formed and refined in one's early life and career trajectory. Danilo Graff, a Black man, husband, and father, who grew up in a family of public servants, told a story of how his search for a values-driven career drove him into and out of SA and towards a career in K–12 education. Danilo's struggles with work-life integration, racism, and elitism slowly eroded his commitment to SA, culminating in a pivotal conversation with a Black woman elder and colleague in his office that marked a turning point in his career. This story further highlighted how SA leaders can hinder an individual's career change. Finally, like Andrew, Danilo's story covered successive changes. But, unlike others, Danilo's career trajectory did not begin in SA.

When we first met, I invited Danilo to share his career change story. He, like the others, began with his college experiences and ended with his current work in K–12. Unlike the others, we would not explore his early life until the second interview, which still proved salient.

After graduating college and before entering SA, Danilo underwent a few career transitions, beginning with a short stint as a primary school teacher followed by a career in the automobile industry where he worked for four years in sales and marketing. A story methodology with data generated from two points in time proved helpful as Danilo had not shared these earlier transitions during the YouTube panel on his career change. In these initial careers, he recalled not feeling true to who he thought himself to be. Particularly in the private sector, he reached a point where he "didn't enjoy…making folx who already have lots and lots of money even more money at the expense of poor, Black, and Brown folx." Plus, there were covert and overt experiences of anti-Black racism he wanted to get away from. He hinted at the tension

his private sector career created for him in relation to his values of justice and service, a theme that continued throughout his career change story. “It just felt like a place where I was doing a lot more taking than I was giving and it just doesn’t align with who I am,” he shared.

He detailed, with pride, the influential careers of his parents. His mother had been an elementary teacher and eventually retired as a principal. His dad had been a public defender for years, working to recruit students into law, before he changed careers to become a church pastor, which was driven by his belief and want to do “more.” Both his parents occupied public-facing careers that supported Black and Brown students. Like Josephine, who was influenced by a Black church, Danilo also learned to “lift others up.” “If I am getting up to a higher space in life, and I’m not opening doors or bringing other people in with me, then it’s a waste. There’s no gain in that,” he explained. His family’s value of lifting Black and Brown individuals made him question and, ultimately, leave his work in the private sector.

During this period of misalignment between his private-sector career and familial values, Danilo returned to his college campus with his wife, then fiancé, where he reconnected with an old advisor and mentor, who had previously discussed SA careers with him in college and, again, revisited the idea of an SA career with Danilo. His mentor shared, “It could be interesting if you look at this space and look at the field. I think it’s something you could really do and do well.” On his flight home from the trip, Danilo “started looking at SAHE graduate programs.” During this period of discernment, he asked himself, “How can I get closer and closer to supporting students directly?” Eventually, Danilo enrolled in and completed his master’s in higher education from a public research university while working full-time in the private sector. Upon graduation, he left the private sector for his first SA role in commuter services, which was “tough” as he took a “50% pay cut.” Yet, he felt “it was the right move,” adding, “it felt like an opportunity to do

lots of values affirming work." Danilo's story confirmed Stimpson's (2009) anecdotal observation "that some individuals join the student affairs profession later in their careers after working in…other professional areas" (p. 22).

In his new SA role, Danilo enjoyed building out services for commuter students to help them navigate a "wildly confusing" "massive" university, especially as these students "weren't sort of seen by the rest of the university." This initial period in his new SA job gave him room to "create space, create time, and create balance" between life and work, where he could enjoy time with his wife and participate in triathlons. Yet, six months into his role, the Vice President of Student Affairs decided that the commuter services office dissuaded students from living on campus, a major source of university revenue. Though Danilo disagreed, the office was closed permanently, and Danilo was moved into student activities. This unwelcome change prompted him to question whether a SA career was a "long-term" goal for him.

In student activities, he oversaw two major student and alumni events (e.g., homecoming), as well as the student diversity programming organization. Running these major events was a "headache" because they were "heavily tied to Greek organizations," which are not always "healthy, partly because, they can be very exclusive, exclusionary of who they bring in." One of these events dated back to the "fifties and sixties, when it was super racist." Danilo worked to lessen the tie of these events to "Greek organizations" by centering "overlooked" students at the university. "I still felt some sense of I'm helping students who don't feel they have a voice have a much stronger voice in the space. …it aligned to what I wanted to be able to give students." In SA, Danilo enjoyed supporting students left out of traditional campus events and relegated to the "smaller hallways" of the university to expand their presence through "counterculture" programming (e.g., a campus radio station).

Yet, Danilo's SA work grew strenuous over four years, largely because of poor SA workplace conditions. His efforts to change the major student and alumni events "made lots of people upset," particularly white alumni. As follow-up meetings with donors and alumni grew cumbersome, Danilo did not "have the energy or the care." Plus, Danilo faced concurrent challenges in his SA career: lack of pay (challenging his ability to have children), lack of mid-career prospects, work-life imbalance, especially as major campus events required him to stay overnight on campus for days away from his wife, an unsupportive supervisor, a lack of recognition that centering students and adult professionals in SA are not mutually exclusive, encounters of anti-Black racism from white wealthy alumni, lack of colleagues of Color, and job strain. "It just wears you out," he explained. Over time, his need for well-being as a Black man and husband, who wanted children, added onto his existing values of justice and service.

Eventually, Danilo's effort to support "Black and Brown individuals" stagnated given his university's stubborn "structures and systems." "The face of what a university looks like on a day-to-day basis…where I worked, it was often white…middle-to-upper middle-class students. It really wasn't the Black and Brown students who were…in the day-to-day action because their experiences were just different," he shared. His struggles to serve Black and Brown students in SA grew to conflict with his values of justice and service.

During this period, Danilo was also exposed to other SA professional spaces, colleagues, and career conversations, which helped him clarify that an SA career conflicted with his existing and emergent values. His past graduate colleagues shared similar challenges with working in SA in online group chats and at conferences. "No one seems to like these roles," Danilo shared, while laughing. Informal online chat and professional conference spaces normalized how "every person in a junior to mid-level role seemed fairly frustrated. And only

the folx who were in sort of more senior roles seemed like they're in a really great space." Like Josephine, Danilo believed the SA career ladder to be "broken." He began to "look for other jobs" and initially limited himself to "colleges and university" because he felt all he "can find is this," an SA job, especially as he was location-bound due to his wife's work. "The idea that all I have for potential places to work are these local HE institutions and then all I have in terms of earning potential is this, it just felt like a very frustrating and limiting experience." He struggled to figure out what his "pathway" to "move up" would be in SA despite the "many limitations." Through his search for other SA jobs, he determined the pay increases would not be sufficient in addressing his need to increasingly balance values-driven work with his desire to have children. Eventually, a colleague of Danilo's transitioned from working in Greek housing to a third-party vendor contracted by HE institutions (e.g., Sodexo), a shift that sparked his awareness about adjacent paths. Further, when he shadowed SA leaders, he was disappointed to learn his contact with students would decrease along a traditional Dean of Students and Vice President of Student Affairs career path and would require a doctorate. "I don't think I want their journey for my journey. I don't think that what they're doing is what I want in my own life," he said of that time.

In a separate occasion, a Black woman elder, who also worked in student activities, entered Danilo's office, what he now remembered as a "random" and "weird" "out of nowhere moment." She sat down across from Danilo and looked directly into his eyes before she asked him, "Why do you work here?" Danilo replied to her question with a question, "What do you mean?" His colleague pointed out that "there aren't many Black people who work in spaces like this" and continued to ask Danilo if he could see himself in SA for a "long time." His colleagues' questions mirrored his internal concerns about an SA career. As laughter filled the interview, he could not shake the feeling that his colleague's parting words were a premonition of his

impending exit. “If there’s more that you want for your life,” she told him, “I don’t think you will be able to get it sitting in this office. … you want a family, you want kids.” The words echoed in his mind after all these years, stirring a yearning for change years earlier. This unsuspecting conversation marked another turning point in Danilo’s career trajectory.

Following this talk, Danilo resolved to leave SA with a job change in HE to give himself time to build up his reserves, find support, and explore new career options for himself. He noted:

> I just, the strain of the five or six years, however, long it was in student affairs, I was like, ‘I just need to get out of this space because my brain can’t handle just like the strain and stress of doing a job this challenging, having this many folx who feel they know how to do my job better, all the while like barely making enough money to pay for our mortgage and have a kid’…I mean a part of me didn’t have a kid any earlier than that because it was literally like I don’t see how we can afford to have a child.

In the end, a SA career “felt pretty misaligned” with Danilo’s values, namely his well-being.

Eventually, he left SA for a job in alumni relations at the same HE institution due to a connection he had developed with the director of the department while in SA. Though he worked in this new role for a couple years, he also pursued the role to look for ways to get out of higher education. Unlike Josephine, who used a job change in SA to prepare for her exit out of SA, Danilo used a job change in another campus area “out of student affairs” to “build [his] sanity back.” Like Josephine, this move gave him the “time” he needed to get himself “ready” for a career change, “meet with a career coach,” get his resume “built up,” and prepare for interviews.

This HE job change also enabled him and his wife to have children. As he embarked on this new chapter of his life as a parent, Danilo shook his head, remembering the “vitriol” following the 2016 Presidential elections, which unfolded just as his wife gave birth to their

daughter. Though he knew he could do his job in alumni relations for a "long time," this political moment in U.S. history heightened Danilo's desire to undergo a career change that aligned with his values of justice, service, and well-being. "What sort of world are we gonna raise our daughter in, and what version of that world do I want to be a part of helping or hurting? I think that became sort of this big push for me," he remembered thinking to himself.

In his steps toward reinventing his career, he recalled how the alumni relations job allowed him to earn "a little bit more money" and "still tap into the resources that like a university would offer in terms of having career coaching." His career coach translated the "breadth" of his SA accomplishments to other industries in his resume, which he described as "one of the most needed pieces." Further, a campus program (another university resource) helped him connect to "various other charters and districts." This program informed hiring school districts and government agencies that Danilo had the skill set they wanted and helped him secure interviews. Eventually he found a K–12 charter school role. "I was able to find someone who was looking for my type of background. Someone who had worked in alumni relations, who had worked in student success type roles." Shortly after beginning his new charter school job, he facilitated a final SA leadership program with a SA buddy, which coincidentally took place in his childhood hometown. The echoes of his past mingled with the promise of his future, creating a symphony of change and possibility once more. The leadership program was a "closing of a book" and an appropriate "ending" in a hometown where he had grown accustomed to farewells, transitions, and moving on. "I think that probably was the last time that I thought of myself as like student affairs. …I think from that point forward, I was like, 'I'm an educator. I work in education, and that's what I do." This shift in professional identity was distinct. "When I was in

student affairs…I didn't see myself as an educator. I think I saw myself as a student affairs professional or someone who like works at a university."

Notably, not all actors in Danilo's life supported his effort to rebuild his career. Danilo faced anger from senior SA leaders following his job change in HE, unlike the other storytellers. "When I told my mentors in student affairs that I was leaving, they were angry with me. They were not happy with me. …I was still somewhere else at the university for the time. And they didn't really want to talk to me." Though his junior colleagues were "overjoyed" for him, senior professionals, some of whom had been his mentors and others he had gone to for "guidance," no longer accepted his invitations to meet. Some insisted that Danilo could "grow" in SA even though he communicated that an SA career was no longer for him. Some were also unsupportive of Danilo's decision to leave HE altogether. For instance, Danilo asked one SA leader to write him a letter in support for his K–12 applications, and this leader never got around to it.

Luckily, Danilo had other resources that facilitated his transition. Danilo emphasized that his graduate program in HE taught him to see his SA work as a part of a broader HE industry and gave him "confidence to be okay with looking outside of just student affairs," which also translated into looking outside campus-based work. Plus, Danilo had his father's career change example, which gave him the "mental freedom to see changing careers isn't the end of the world." He also found comfort in a quote from Vince Scully, a former Dodger's baseball announcer, who once said, "If you do something you love, you'll never work a day in your life." "I always figured that I would get to a place where I'd eventually make enough money… [but] a driving core for me was the idea of like let me find a job that I care about, that matters to me, that motivates me that aligns to my values, and that I love doing, and I'll do that." Further, seeing his graduate school peers leave SA served as "recognition" for his own transition.

Danilo also noted that his career changes prior to SA made navigating the transition less "weighty" for him. He remembered "finding common ground" with "racist dudes" in the private sector which gave him the confidence to initially move into SA. Similarly, he felt his experiences motivating college students would translate into his work in K–12. Danilo contrasted his decision to leave SA from his colleagues who went into SA "young" for whom "it is leaving something that is deep inside the core of [their] heart." For younger professionals, exiting SA may signify "leaving your home to go to someplace unknown and different and uncertain." "I get that feeling of leaving something that's in your core being. Its value is based at that point in time. I think the term SA expats is a values-based term…not everyone gets to call themselves an expat." Yet, Danilo did not adopt the SA expatriate identity to be a "defining value" for him during his career change, unlike some of his colleagues who had left SA.

In his new K–12 career, Danilo adapted to a new organization and managed a larger team. His initial transition was far from smooth as his new co-workers "were just doubtful" of his "background," especially as they perceived him to "move to the top of the organization" though he "hadn't sat in their same seats." Danilo, who liked "to move very quickly," had to also learn how to "slow down" his work to be "compliant" to new "laws and policies."

The skills Danilo acquired from SA assisted him in his effort to build a career as an educator. For instance, his work in SA gave him the ability to understand what it feels like to be "the least powerful position, person in whatever room you're in…[and] still to navigate movement, navigate change, and like, get people to do something slightly different." He added, "There's a skill set that you learn and pick up in being able to move people, motivate people, and have them, see your point of view." Relatedly, his work supporting students at their "best" and "worst" translated into his new supervisory responsibilities. Danilo also felt his master's, which

in HE constituted the "least" education, was received as the "most" education at his new work. Finally, his work in SA had also taught him to build relationships and use analytical thinking to navigate organizational policies and politics.

In my interviews with Danilo, we also discussed two of the obvious contradictions in his career change story, which remained ongoing for him. The first contradiction involved his decision to not pursue senior-level SA career paths because they would limit his time with students. Yet, in his current senior-level role at a charter school, he struggled to find time to work with students directly. He admitted missing the opportunity to build "deep" "long lasting relationships" with students as he once did in his SA work. In his current work, he has "transitioned" that "energy" "into the development of younger staff, having conversations with them, connecting with them, and helping them develop and grow." He still noted how someday he can see his career shifting back to working with "students more on a day-to-day basis," especially when his "two little ones" are older. "I think, some version of moving back to, whether it be student affairs or counseling or something," he said, while laughing and clarifying that if he goes back to SA as a 50-year-old it will not be as a programmer. Danilo, though happy in his role, still aspired to find time with students while balancing his other work. He said:

> Where can I put myself in a place where I'm still able to do…the things that I'd like to do, enjoy the space that I have, and work more closely with folx that I think that I can help…motivate and push and drive…in a way that I'm not necessarily able to do now?

A second contradiction included his critiques of HE and his current role where he is partly responsible for promoting HE to K–12 students. "I think…one of the bigger challenges of my job, it's, like, I have to both believe in universities and the value that they bring, but also understand the criticism that universities earned," he said. He tried to navigate this contradiction

by using his SA work experiences to let K–12 kids know both what they can "gain" from "getting a four-year degree," which he knows yields real material benefits, and the "flaws" of these organizations. Particularly, "being a person of color going to an aggressively white space is incredibly challenging" and "asking individuals to move into places and spaces where they may be viewed as less than, purely for the potential financial gain that could come from them." Despite this tension, he is "incredibly proud" of how his work has helped more than half of the student alumni of the charter graduate from college, where students are 94% BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and/or People of Color), 78% low-income, and 75% first-generation. This rate is "higher" than the graduation rate of the public research university he worked at previously.

Like others, Danilo enjoyed resources from undergoing a career change. These positive outcomes included: ease in organizational decision-making, limited bureaucracy, working with "passionate" colleagues who are "truly putting the students' needs first, the family needs first," feeling valued as a Black man, though he still negotiated anti-Black racism, and perceiving to have a greater work-life integration and impact than his SA work by helping "families recognize that their students can go to a university." Danilo added that he is "still plenty busy" but his "busy looks different," as he has greater flexibility and control over his time, allowing him "to be a whole human being." Though he occasionally worked evenings from home, he appreciated work no longer bounded him to a physical campus, allowing him to enjoy his roles as a husband and father who could be at home to help put the kids to bed and see his wife. He also told me that the time he carved out for this study would not have been possible in his past SA roles.

Danilo's career change invigorated his values of justice, service, and well-being. He aimed to help people access opportunities to "become much better versions of themselves." He no longer believed his career trajectory was limited to "just a space, or a university, or place

where" he is. With the power of hindsight, he understood his career trajectory with great clarity. "What I've been doing is educating folx, helping them get better," shared Danilo happily. Though he knew his career will continue to evolve in the future, he also enjoyed not having the pressure of answering "what's next?" Danilo elaborated:

> When I was working in student affairs, often, it was, like, 'How do I do more? Where can I go? … My goals around what I want to do and what I want to be have changed so much because…who I am is slightly different. But, also, …I have the capacity and…I have an organization that's willing to support me…which is very different.

For Danilo, who is driven to help others "be their best self" given his values, participating in Jeannie's YouTube panel series felt fitting. One, it was a way to support a fellow panelist and friend who had a more "traumatic" transition out of SA. Two, it was a way to help attendees learn a more "accurate" story of career change he felt was left unaddressed in the SA field. Danilo felt that unlike "other industries" that "want to build you up and make you as good as possible so that other folx want you," "student affairs has done a poor job of explaining to people what is it that they can do and what is it that they, what skill(s) they bring to the table." Danilo felt that the absence of discussions on career change in SA to be "nefarious," "disingenuous," and "dishonest," likening it to the idea of "holding someone hostage in a career." "There's something about that just morally and ethically wrong to not let someone know you have other choices," he said. In hindsight, he wished he had heard SA graduates and professionals share:

> Cool, here is the diversified skill set you're building by working in this space. It can work in student affairs, and if it does fantastic. If it doesn't, great. Here are the skills that you picked up that you actually could use in other places and here are the types of jobs that exist where those skills are in high demand.

Given what he yearned to hear during his career change, he stressed to attendees and future viewers that their SA career provides a "level of flexibility" given the "toolbox that they've built," and that this toolbox "could be useful in lots of other spaces." Like me, others have contacted Danilo through the panel to discuss their questions about the career change experience.

In revisiting his participation in the online panel three years prior, Danilo valued that the YouTube panels allowed the panelists' stories to live on the internet in perpetuity, transcending the constraints of time in the digital world. Though his story "continues to grow and expand and become a bit more dynamic," he valued that the recorded YouTube panel may support someone who is "frustrated and tired" and is feeling "fatigue" and "loneliness" and is unsure what to do in SA or in any career. "I love the idea that some random person who's never met me and probably will never meet me has at least the opportunity to say, 'Okay. Right. This thing still exists. I can listen…I can change careers and not feel that's the end of everything for me.'"

Danilo's Career Change Summary

Danilo's positionality as a Black man, husband, and the son of public servants influenced his career decisions and goals. Growing up in a family of educators who experienced career changes motivated by altruistic values, Danilo developed a similar desire to pursue a career that aligned with his values of justice and service. After marriage, a sense of well-being also shaped his career decisions and goals. Danilo's experiences highlighted the significance of linked lives with parents, partners, and colleagues, in shaping career transitions. Unlike the others, Danilo's career trajectory did not begin directly in SA. His earlier career change to SA from sales helped him to manage his departure from SA when his work collided with his values once again.

Danilo's decision to leave SA was influenced by a culmination of factors, including the closure of the commuter office, where he first worked in SA, the exclusionary nature of campus

programs assigned to him in student activities, and the ongoing challenges of working in a predominantly white and affluent environment. Despite his efforts to promote inclusion and address systemic issues, Danilo felt that his values of justice, service, and well-being were being compromised. His growing disillusionment, coupled with a conversation with a trusted Black woman elder and colleague, marked a subjective turning point and led him to a career pivot.

After deciding to leave SA, Danilo took a planful approach to his career change. He initially transitioned into a role within the university's alumni office to recover from his SA position. This shift allowed him to explore other career options and utilize campus and external resources, like coaching, to prepare his job materials. He also had time to prioritize his personal well-being by focusing on family planning with his wife. Eventually, Danilo participated in a recruiting program for charter schools, which helped him match with a new K–12 opportunity.

Danilo's transition was influenced by both resources and constraints in SA. While he received support from some SA colleagues, he also faced social repercussions from former SA mentors who disapproved of his decision to leave SA. Like other participants, Danilo also encountered a lack of resources and discussion within the SA field regarding career change.

Danilo's post-transition experiences were marked by a renewed sense of purpose and resources. His new work as an educator and administrator at a K–12 charter school allowed him to live out his values of justice, service, and well-being. The opportunity to serve students of color and their families while also enjoying greater work-life integration served as a resource that aided Danilo's transition. His skills, honed during his time in SA, also proved invaluable in his new role, enabling him to address colleagues' concerns about his outsider status. Despite facing constraints, Danilo found great satisfaction in his new work. His experiences also motivated him to support others who were considering similar career transitions in the SA field.

CHAPTER 8: CREATING YOUR CIRCUMSTANCES

*"'B**** Better Have My Money.'" —Rihanna*

In Veronica's story of career change, she left SA to be a "businessperson" and "leader" in adjacent non-profits centering education. As a daughter of two Black scientists, Veronica grew up to value agency, financial well-being, and inclusion, which directed her career decisions. Veronica began her story by describing her departure from SA for an adjacent career as an "escape" from financial challenges and workplace exclusion. Ultimately, Veronica's departure from SA stemmed from escalating work issues, which concluded in a turning point involving white tears, which have been documented to be a source of Black women's attrition from SA (Williams, 2019). Her story is not about settling into a single organization for an extended period after exiting SA, unlike Josephine and Danilo, but entailed navigating ongoing transitions, like Andrew. Finally, even after her career change, she remained involved in SA.

Veronica exuded confidence and told it as it is. She did not shy away from discussing her failures, nor celebrating her successes as a Black woman, mother, daughter, and educational leader who has reinvented her career unapologetically to meet her needs. Her honest reflections on her career change were often punctuated with a wide smile. As with the YouTube panel, her direct demeanor and laughter filled our interviews, and I found myself joining in as she recounted her story. Like the others, she began her story with early life events.

Veronica drew a deep breath before beginning. "I would characterize my career changes like an escape," she said. Her parents were scientists. Yet, she remembered not having "one scientific bone in [her] body." At home, college was a "foregone conclusion," though no one sat her down for a "career skills inventory." "'Well, duh, you go to college, and then you get a job,' and I think it was sort of this magical thing that people thought happened, like college

automatically begets a job," she explained. These initial career narratives were shaped by her parents, who encouraged her to consider MBA programs, telling her to "go be a businessperson." They encouraged pursuing work she loved but were also realistic, stating, "Work is work, like, not everybody loves their job, like, 'Can you pay your bills?'" While Veronica eventually became a businessperson, her initial goal as a young adult was to find any job.

In college, Veronica narrowed her focus on a management major. "I'm gonna get a credential that says I'm good at bossing people around. Like this is perfect for me," she said. Yet, when she went to "college fourscore and seven years ago," internships were "not really a thing," and in her major she "never really got any business experience." Outside of classes, she was exposed to two different career paths. She had summer internships with her parents in their pharmaceutical production work, and she became involved in campus student-leadership roles. When her parents grew "tired" of her "asking for money" and told her to "find a job," she found work in the campus admissions office, which was her first "foray into student affairs." Veronica also became involved as the vice president of her student hall council as a first-year student, which she jokingly recalled as an effort to "stage a coup" in "retaliation" of her hall director. This involvement grew into a string of student leadership roles in residence life (e.g., Resident Assistant), where she "sort of figured out what student affairs was."

Almost done with college, Veronica began thinking about "getting a job." She recalled having a "quintessential college graduate life crisis, like, 'What the hell do I want to do with my life?'" During this crisis, Veronica knew, unquestionably, that she valued her freedom. "I don't want to move back home. I'm not trying to live in my momma's house. I've had four years of amazing freedom so what can I do to make sure that I don't move back home?" Around then, she was sponsored to attend a regional residence life conference. It was a "big old join student affairs

fest," where she decided to pursue a SA job. The conference exposed her and other undergraduate students to different SA areas and explained how they "could…go work on a college campus." "That was like some real good, whatever they did," she shared, chuckling.

From there, Veronica began to apply for SA jobs through placement conferences and was hired for her first job as a hall director in residence life at a private religious research university. She remembered a lovely yet hellishly busy August month when she began her first SA job. Veronica's colleagues, who went to "big student affairs program powerhouses," were "pissed" at her lack of graduate credentials. Confused by her colleagues "envy," she continued to treat her role as a "job," not her career. "I was still on the fence about this whole education thing. Like, it was a means to an end. At the time, it was a, 'I don't have to move back home, and someone's gonna pay me to do a job,'" she explained. This SA entry-level role gave Veronica time to be on the "fence" about her "career professionally." She experimented with becoming a lawyer and studied for the LSAT, quickly realizing that was not her "ministry."

This first SA job also helped her come to terms with her naivete about "money" and "salary," which she grew to prioritize in her career decisions. She became weary of her first SA role when she "discovered that they were paying [her] pennies on the dollar, and [she] was being exploited heavily." Through a colleagues' attempts to prorate his salary as a 10-month employee across 12-months, she learned that hall directors qualify for public assistance. The university, an elite private religious research institution, was displeased when employees discovered this and blocked subsequent requests. Veronica desired more than just a job; she now sought financial well-being. Before this, she "had no concept of what a lot of money was, or what a little bit of money was." "I guess that's my privilege of how I grew up. I just never had to worry about money," she admitted. Even with privilege, she added, "I still didn't know what I was worth."

After reaching a "tipping point" in her first SA job and ruling out her interest in law school, Veronica heeded her colleagues' lament to "go and get a master's degree" if she wanted to "get anywhere" in SA. Unlike her initial SA entry, she was now consciously investing in an SA career with her pursuit of a graduate degree. She eventually enrolled in a one-year graduate program with a housing assistantship. "I've already worked for two years. I've basically had on the job experience. I don't need seven practicums. Like, I'm just trying to get in and out at this point," she explained. Her decision was "transactional." During her "whirlwind" one-year graduate program, she pursued the "education policy and community college development" track over the SA track. She "wanted a new experience" and "to learn something different" about HE, recognizing the need to diversify her career options early on. It was also the first time she recognized "there are other sides" to HE that her past SA colleagues had not been "very transparent about." This period planted initial seeds about adjacent careers.

After a "wild eight months" of graduate school, she secured an SA job, which she "did not want" but ultimately accepted given "scarcity" during a "recession" and an illness leading her to miss out on the SA placement conferences. Veronica's return to an entry-level SA role marked the beginning of a series of internal SA transitions she would make to improve her work conditions, placing her SA career in contention with her growing want for financial well-being. Her transitions also reflected SA career advice, telling her "You wanted to show you can work in different places with different student populations." "I only ever intended to be somewhere three years max," she explained. She also tried to mold her SA career according to linear and lifelong narratives, telling her to "go work in ResLife, and then you have to be the assistant director, and then you have to be director" and "then go be a dean, go be a president." By internalizing these narratives, she initially tolerated the challenging work conditions. "Okay, if I'm trying to be the

university president, maybe I have to have seven low-paying jobs before I get to be moderately well paid one…because people before you had to endure that," she thought.

Yet, Veronica did not expect her SA concerns to remain after her job changes in SA. She left her first post-graduate SA job due to the institution's lack of prestige and student conduct policies. From SA colleagues, she learned to avoid jobs at "middle of nowhere" institutions. "I need a name brand career…Because I don't ever want somebody to be like, 'Where is that?'" In her second SA role, though she joined a well-known public research university in a Southern U.S. state, her white lesbian woman supervisor lacked the "cultural dynamics" involved in "supervising a Black person," making her "life hell." As a northerner, she found the institution "confusing" and experienced racial isolation as one of two Black SA professionals there. For the "first time" her "dissolution" with SA began, and she thought, "Maybe I should do something else, because this is not working for me." She elaborated:

> I applied to Ph.D. programs. And my motivation was off. My applications were trash. I didn't get in anywhere because I was just doing it to escape her, right? Not because I was ready, or because I wanted to, because I had anything worthwhile to study at the time.

Veronica changed jobs again to work at a new satellite campus for a private research university, where she oversaw "all of student life." She enjoyed working with a diverse team. Yet, faced with facilities issues, an unclear campus mission, an entitled student body, and a supervisor who "knew nothing about student affairs," Veronica transitioned to a new role on the main campus, which would be her final SA position. In hindsight, this move between campuses at the same HE institution only exacerbated her initial concerns about entitled students and institutional elitism. She was at a school that was "99% white, 99% wealthy," and the dean would say "wildly racist stuff." "I had enough and quite frankly I had a moment where like there

were too many white woman tears in my office, and I was like, 'I can't do this anymore,'" she explained. The "pinnacle moment" marking the turning point in Veronica's SA career involved a wealthy white woman student whose mother was the dean of the nursing school. This student had a free furnished apartment on campus "as part of the dean's compensation" and she was also "the president of student government." Recalling her interaction with the student, Veronica said:

> I had to endure this girl all the time. She would be in my office crying about nothing. One day I was like, 'Why, what are you crying about? What is your actual problem? 'Girl, get a grip. There are people here with actual problems, and you are not one of them.' At that point I was like, 'I can't do this anymore. I have reached my reasonable limit.'

In addition to this pivotal exchange, Veronica was realizing how much money people were making in SA roles, like the dean of students, roles typically filled by "older white men." With this knowledge, her resentment grew. She felt "underpaid" and "underappreciated." She told herself, "I need to get out of here. And that did mean both the physical space and maybe the career space. But really the physical place was the more salient space."

Veronica, in deciding to leave campus-based work, was struck with fear initially. "I didn't know what else there was to do. …Sure, I studied business undergrad. Like, maybe I could go work on Wall Street? I don't know. I wouldn't even know how to get there. I don't even know what the hell I'm doing," she recalled. Veronica desired to locate a career where she could "continue to help" without being "taken advantage of."

One day, Veronica went on LinkedIn and "started" "clicking around." "Online resources have been integral in, like, a lot of my career movement," she said. Eventually, she learned about an educational access role at a non-profit supporting student of Color at colleges "all over the country." "I can do that. Like, I've worked at every college at this point. I can do this," she told

herself. Through the application process, she proved herself right. In leaving SA and joining the non-profit, Veronica did not initially process the ten years spent building an SA career. She just thought, "Thank god, I don't have to go there anymore," referring to the elite institution she left. "I was too angry to grieve honestly. I was, like, I need to get the fuck up out of here." She attributed this exit strategy to her family, explaining:

> I am pretty sure that comes from…my childhood, and just the way that my family is. It's like you don't have to sit back and take anybody's crap, period. …you know, create for yourself a set of circumstances where you can do what you want to do, when you want to do it, and you are not beholden to any circumstance or place that does not suit you.

Indeed, Veronica utilized her family's lessons about agency to adapt to her career change.

Veronica spent five years in the non-profit role following her SA exit, the longest role of her career. While she walked into her position with "nothing there" but "archaic" cabinets, files, and even a dated encyclopedia, she "loved that." She channeled the "higher ed" in her, telling herself, "Oh, I got this…I'm gonna build it better than they would have told me to do it anyway." Her biggest hurdle was "shifting mental models" in the non-profit from seeing themselves strictly as a K–12 education organization to also embracing themselves as a "college access organization," yielding "college graduates and career professionals." Veronica's transition also included resources, such as an organization full of people of color, work with students of color, a shift from being "siloed to one campus" to working with "80 colleges," supportive supervisors, a $20,000 salary increase, and greater work-life integration, including generous maternity leave benefits. These resources solidified her values. She no longer felt she had to bide her time and delay her financial well-being until her mid-forties. Veronica elaborated:

> I do not need to do any of that. I can be CEO before I turn 40. I can make a couple of $100,000 dollars. Who are you to tell me that I need to be underpaid to get experience, right? Like, I can't put that in my 401K, I can't pay my bills with that...once you leave or you get a little space, you get a little bit more information. I don't have to do any of that.

Veronica continued to adapt her career as a leader in education through job changes across non-profit organizations. After five terrific years with her first non-profit, she was again "ready to go" and "didn't know what was next." Veronica's search was "much longer" the second time. "I was just trying to figure out what was out there," she said. Eventually, she learned about her second adjacent role through "word of mouth" from a professional contact. This contact, a student alum of the hiring organization, arranged a meeting for her, which she believed was a consultation for her expertise. Only later when the meeting ended in salary negotiations did Veronica realize it was an interview. "I had no idea, right? So, sometimes things just happen, and you have to sort of be open to the universe as well," she noted.

Her second adjacent role was at a "behemoth of an organization" that had 2,000 employees who served children and families. Veronica was responsible for charter school networks, after school programs, and college access, serving 3,000 participants, which came with a 10-million-dollar budget and 50 full-time staff. This second non-profit role was "stressful" because of the "size" of the organization, and the "level" of her role, and the organization's "super high" standards. Unlike her previous organization, her new colleagues questioned her as an external hire. Complicating matters, Veronica applied to Ph.D. programs right before learning about the role, and her son was also about to turn one. Things quickly grew unwieldy as she approached her first-year mark in the role and ended her first term of graduate school at the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. Veronica was "always working," about "50 to 70 hours a week,"

including weekends and weeknights with emergency call responsibilities, like those in SA. "What are you thinking," she asked her past self. "I want to do things the hard way," she responded back to herself, chuckling. In hindsight, her career change allowed her to avoid a SA doctorate for a Ph.D. in "organizational change" instead, which was "more fitting" for her now career in non-profits addressing education across the lifespan. Veronica clarified:

> I still am higher education adjacent. If I want to go back and work on the college campus, if I want to be a President, if I want to be a professor, if I want to do both of those things at the same time, it certainly doesn't hurt to have the Ph.D.

In the end, Veronica managed the varying work issues because of her organization's generous benefits, which included: support for her doctoral studies, a $50,000 salary bump, generous benefits, an "unapologetically Black" organizational mission, colleagues who looked like her, supervisors who respected her need to prioritize her son, and work-life integration. "I go to work happy every single day. I love my job, I love my students, I love my team, my CEO, like, gets on leadership calls every morning and tells us all she loves us. Like, I never had a college president tell me that they loved me and that they valued me and that they appreciated me," she explained. More importantly, she felt "valued in [her] bank account" *and* "in the words." At the onset of the pandemic, she also drew comfort in her work, as she was in a unique position to "make a difference and help people." After two years, she earned a promotion to a managing director position that came with greater compensation. The process of "chasing" this promotion helped her further her career in education access and "step into, like, 'You are the leader. You are the decision maker. Like, it starts and stops with you.'"

After leaving SA, Veronica still drew on her SA skills and networks to navigate her career as a "businessperson" and "leader" in education access. "I became a businessperson

through the lens of education, and had I not started in student affairs, like, none of this would have happened," she observed. Veronica was the "only person in the organization[s] with a higher education master's degree," which gave her a "unique perspective" as her new colleagues had not studied "how students actually develop from a perspective that wasn't their own." Plus, Veronica leveraged her SA connections in ACPA and NASPA to support students in her college access programs. "Even if I don't know someone directly, I might know someone who does know them. I know how to speak the language when I'm calling a dean, or I'm calling a President, or I'm calling the financial aid office," she explained.

For Veronica, the pop artist Rihanna's well-known song, "B**** Better Have My Money," signified her career change. While laughing, she added, "Honestly! That was the number one thing I was thinking about, like, there has to be a way out of this. Like, I will do the work that I love, but somebody's got to pay me for this." Her work as a "businessperson" and "leader" in educational non-profits has allowed her to "move the barometer on money every time." "Now I want more. I'm like a whole ass capitalist now," she said, doubling over with laughter. Despite her playful tone, Veronica also offered a critical reflection. "The fact that I am a Black woman, and I am a person of color in this country, and…it is exponentially more challenging and more dangerous for me to traverse this planet. I should be compensated for that alone," she explained. Veronica's ability to navigate her career change towards financial well-being as a Black woman has also been aided by intentional coaching. At her second non-profit, another CEO, a Black man, was "very vocal" that "Black women are always underpaid" and that "Black women, like, women generally do not advocate for themselves." The CEO would "goad" his employees into "arguing with him for more money." This CEO helped her grow "confident" about meeting her financial needs through her career decisions. Altogether, her career change

helped her recalibrate the belief she learned in SA that people will "think I'm only here for the money." "Well, I am only here for the money," she noted, roaring with laughter.

Uniquely, Veronica continued to attend the major SA conferences led by NASPA and ACPA after her exit from SA to host receptions for the 100-plus HE institutions she worked with in her non-profit roles. Some attendees found her presence at the conferences confusing, asking her, "Oh, why are you here?" "[B]ecause I work with college students…just because I'm not a dean or whatever, it doesn't mean that I don't do student affairs work," she responded. Others were surprised to learn that her non-profit job funded her conference expenses and up-scale receptions. Veronica enjoyed seeing attendees' "wheels turning" as education adjacent paths had not "dawned" on them and helping individuals realize they could work with college students and not work on a college campus. "'Are you hiring,' like, that was the number one question I got," she said. Even though Veronica managed new work content (e.g., K–12 education) in her roles, consistent with a career change, she also extended her prior work in HE after leaving SA.

> After leaving SA, Veronica also promoted alternative careers within SA. She shared:
>
> I put in the same conference program proposal for ACPA and NASPA, and it was basically about like student affairs adjacent careers and how to consider getting a student affairs adjacent career, like you still work with college students…but like in a different capacity. ACPA…accepted it, and NASPA declined it.

With a hint of critique, she added, "This is on brand." NASPA, which Veronica described as "corporate, business, buttoned up," "sees themselves as, like, the savior of student affairs. And, if they have a presentation about how to leave the field then they're acknowledging that there's a problem, and they're acknowledging that these adjacent careers are a solution." Comparatively, because "ACPA has been more young women, LGBT friendly…more progressive," they are "a

bit more open to this idea of multiple pathways to success." For Veronica, "[e]ven though there are things that need to change about the SA field," the field should embrace how "there is plenty that has obviously set up people to be successful" instead of exclusively "focusing on trapping and retaining." Just like academic research promotes multiple citations and perspectives, she suggested SA graduate programs should offer "these different perspectives" to their students.

Interestingly, Veronica still had some success with NASPA. Through her adjacent roles, she sponsored NASPA internships for undergraduate students traditionally exploring SA, the kind she would have appreciated years ago. "I sought that opportunity because again, like, wanted to provide an alternate sort of experience for someone considering student affairs as a career on the front end, as like…you can go work in housing, or you can come do this," she shared. These wider efforts also led her to participate in the YouTube panel. Because SA can be a "cult" where "people on your campus aren't going to tell you or help," she wanted to participate in the online discussion to affirm people they can "find something on the other side." Veronica wished she had known of other options while in SA so she could "have gotten different skills or availed [herself] to different opportunities, knowing that this whole world outside of the walls of college existed, and [she] could have a more lucrative, more fulfilling career." She also felt YouTube created accessibility for viewers regardless of "where you are in space and time," serving as an "archive." Finally, she wanted to disrupt the narrative of SA careers as "linear pathway[s]" and instead told viewers to see SA careers as "porous" where "you can leave and come back" and in fact "leaving and coming back will help you get paid more, and it will help you bring in a unique perspective that doesn't probably exist on campus." Indeed, she has embraced this message for herself as she remained open to becoming a college president.

Since the YouTube panel, Veronica exited the second non-profit, citing a mismatch with a new supervisor and ongoing volatility in senior roles (e.g., unexpected terminations). Leaving this organization was hard because of the "golden handcuffs" that came in the form of pay, year-end bonuses, retirement plans, healthcare, and holiday parties. Yet, eventually, she and a few of her colleagues "banded together" for their job search, because they knew "this is hard to leave on your own, because they make it so good to stay." Together, she and her close colleagues were able to "break out," though the exit proved difficult. "I actually cried on my last day because I didn't really want to leave. I felt I had to leave…I loved the organization. I love the people, I love the work that I was doing, although, again in hindsight…it was not sustainable."

Now, in her third adjacent role, she enjoyed the "breathing room," but felt she has returned to a "hyper white" space again. "I hate the feeling, like I feel it…the racism, the microaggressions…the bullshit," she recounted, exhausted. She felt nostalgic about her last two employers, yearning to be around people that look like her again. As she continued to navigate her career trajectory in education access, she asked herself, "How realistic is it for me that I'm gonna go back into another…saturated environment with people of color? …is it reasonable for me to continuously seek that or is it more reasonable to just find a better environment?" Veronica was at another crossroad. She was open to a "completely new pursuit" out of education too. "I've been doing it for about 10 years... I'm ready for something different." She listed other career possibilities, such as a "Chief HR Officer," "CEO," diversity consultant, and fundraiser. "Who knows where I'll be in five or 10 years," she said. Maybe, she would find her way back to HE as a college president, she thought. For now, she took comfort knowing that her career has evolved since SA to afford her many options, and "this opportunity will set [her] up for [her] next one."

By the end of our time, her description of career change as an "escape" grew to also include a "series of happy accidents." She learned that "you can try to plan" for a career on "Wall Street" but "your life takes a completely different path." She ended her story like she began, with her parents, sharing how they "were really worried" for her and "confused" about where she was "going" for years, but they "get it now."

Veronica's Career Change Summary

Rooted in her upbringing as a Black woman raised by financially secure Black entrepreneurial scientists, Veronica imbibed a strong sense of agency, financial well-being, and a desire for inclusive workplaces. These values and needs formed in her early life influenced her career decisions and goals. Initially, she pursued an SA career as a means of independence, despite her parents' encouragement to pursue a career in business. However, her time in SA exposed her to limitations and challenges of the field. By transitioning to an adjacent role focused on educational access, Veronica aligned her career with her goals, particularly her desire for financial well-being and the entrepreneurial work her parents saw for her.

As Veronica progressed in her SA career, she faced challenges in each of her SA roles, such as problematic supervisors and exclusionary work and pay inequities, that contributed to her growing dissatisfaction. She, like Josephine, initially tried to address her dissatisfaction through role and institutional transitions within the SA profession. Yet, with each transition, she still felt disgruntled, particularly with the lack of financial well-being she perceived in SA. After years of concern, a turning point came when she worked with a privileged white student leader at an elite university. Witnessing the students' entitlement and "white tears" reinforced Veronica's frustration with the SA field. This experience led her to decide that a career change was essential to meet her core needs and values.

Veronica planned her career transition, using LinkedIn as a resource to find a college-access non-profit role. Her skills and knowledge from SA proved invaluable in navigating her new role, as she was the only one in the organization with a deep understanding of HE. Her successful performance led to further opportunities within the non-profit sector, including an organization with an unapologetically Black mission. In her second adjacent role, Veronica benefitted from supportive leaders who facilitated her career reinvention and financial growth, underscoring the influence of linked lives in the transition.

In her second adjacent role, she experienced significant resources that supported her transition, including increased pay, bonus benefits, and support for her doctoral education and parenting responsibilities. Veronica learned to prioritize her financial well-being without apology, recognizing that as a Black woman, she faced systemic social inequities that can, at least partially, be addressed with pay equity. This understanding of her positionality was crucial in shaping her career decisions. Unlike SA, she felt the leaders in her new career setting cared about her as a Black woman and mother. In her new career, she also remained connected with SA professional associations, prospective students, and colleagues. This echoed Williams (2019) findings that some Black women who leave SA still engage in "'#sarogue' or 'higher education adjacent' workplaces as a means to continue to support Black women professionals and students…without the conditional expectation of one's environment" (p. 10).

Of course, with any career transition, there were also constraints. Veronica also encountered unwanted leadership changes and a lack of well-being and balance in the non-profit space despite generous compensation. These constraints prompted Veronica to leave the Black mission-oriented organization for a new role at a predominantly white non-profit, where she once again wondered how to balance her desire for inclusive workplaces with her financial goals.

CHAPTER 9: AN UNANTICIPATED OFF-RAMP TO INCLUSION AND FAMILY

"Diversity and inclusion are ingrained in me as a person, but also as a professional."

Ash, a white heterosexual woman and self-described "nerd," faced instability, exclusion, and a lack of belonging in early life. Her early life instilled in her a desire for stability, belonging, growth, and inclusion, shaping her career decisions and goals. When she found SA, she felt the career aligned with her core needs. However, over time, the reality of her SA career began to diverge from her initial aspirations, particularly her desire to engage in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) work as a white heterosexual woman. In the end, a particularly contentious turning point involving her SA supervisor prompted Ash to resign abruptly and end her SA career. Of all the storytellers, Ash is the only one who underwent an unanticipated transition from student affairs (SA), where she worked for ten years. Following her resignation and workforce exit, Ash leaned on her husband for financial resources until she figured out her career and eventually found a meaningful role in a high-performance computing organization. This new adjacent career allowed her to leverage her SA skills, knowledge, and identity and encouraged her to be a learner and engage in DEI work, providing her with a sense of belonging.

Ash only took five minutes to provide a succinct synopsis of her exit from SA. "I worked in residence life for two years, and then in student activities for two years, and then three years running a student center and doing conference services, and that was my final role in student affairs," she shared. Once she finished cutting to the chase, we began to unravel her career trajectory for greater details about what led to her career change and her subsequent experience.

As a "basically" "first-generation college student," Ash recalled not knowing what she "wanted to do after undergrad." Back then, for Ash, the "fear of not having a job was really present in [her] early career" because she "grew up in a working poor family, with multiple

family members with depression, anxiety, autism, and alcoholism." Like others, she "fell into" SA as a Resident Assistant when her Resident Director advised her, "Well, you've been really good as an RA. Why don't you think about this?" Nearing college graduation, Ash embraced the career "direction" offered to her, hoping to secure stability with her SA career choice.

In graduate school, Ash learned to see SA work as linear, lifelong, and identity-driven. "The messaging was 'You start in housing, or you start in a coordinator role, and then you move up. And, then you move on [to another institution].' I think everybody said they wanted to be a dean of students,'" she remembered, reflecting a dominant SA career path (Holzweiss & Parrott, 2017). Back then, Ash also learned about the "identity thing" in SA. "[Y]ou are a student affairs professional and this is part of your identity. You live in housing, and do it all the time, and you work 80-hour weeks, and travel with students, and that's just who you are," she explained.

Given her childhood experiences with exclusion and differences, Ash also actively pursued DEI work in her early SA roles. Following an "amazing year" of supporting LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer) programs in graduate school, she tried to find an entry-level role in multicultural programs. Yet, despite hearing messages in SA about how "we need allies, we need people to do this work, white people need to take on this work," her attempts to find work in multicultural student affairs were met with conflicting messages. She was told, "No, you can't be paid for that, because you're white and straight."

Admittedly, as a former multicultural student affairs practitioner, I felt some discomfort as Ash recounted her challenges with finding work in multicultural student affairs. I was reminded of Stewart's (2016) writings on SA professionals, who, when "told that their Whiteness may inhibit student learning," perceive this as a "direct assault on not only their sense of self but also their fundamental beliefs about how the world can and should work as a

meritocracy" (p. 22). At the same time, I agreed with Ash's observations that SA professionals with majoritarian identities also need to share in diversity and inclusion work (Pope et al., 2009; Reason & Broido, 2005). I jotted a note about this tension in my journal and listened on.

For Ash, diversity and inclusion was not a fad, but a commitment stemming from her early life. As the only girl in her extended family, she remembered "this feeling of not belonging." This feeling continued into middle school until Ash attended a peer-led presentation on differences. The presentation taught, "We all have differences. All our differences are beautiful, and we need them in order to be a whole society." She remembered thinking, "Those are my people," and she went on to lead that presentation for schools in her county.

Around then, Ash was driven towards DEI by another formative experience. Ash's mother told her that her favorite aunt was gay. Reflecting on her mother's unease, Ash recounted the conversation, with her mother emphasizing, "This doesn't mean that your aunt will ever try to do anything sexual toward you. It doesn't mean she's attracted to you. It doesn't mean she's unsafe for you." Baffled by her mother's masked bias, Ash sought clarity, "Why are you saying this, this way? Like, she's your sister, and we love her, and she's my favorite person on the planet." This conversation alerted Ash that "the way that people are interacting in this world is not right." Later in college, she was further exposed to "actual social justice principles, and all of the history [she] had never learned in grade school." In our interview, Ash interjected with a smile, emphasizing the serendipity of wearing her "Protect Queer Youth" shirt as she delved into the influence of her early family life and DEI commitments on her career decisions. This early familial event remained palpable during our interview, resonating deeply as she revealed, "My little one is gender fluid."

For Ash, DEI were a part of her core needs and sense of self. “[DEI] is something that is just like ingrained in me as a person, but also as a professional,” she reiterated. Yet, given the “double talk” in the SA field, she felt part of her “identity was being shut down.” For a while, Ash resolved to “incorporate” DEI into her voluntary SA work, for instance, “through advising student organizations.”

Relatedly, in SA, Ash “never felt” she “fit in” because of her “nerdiness.” Upon entering SA, Ash perceived she “would be surrounded by a bunch of really smart people, and people would be really excited about learning and progressing and supporting students through their academic journeys.” Given her strengths of “input and learner,” she found herself “reading all these books” and conducting “deep dives…on the Internet” for her first SA role in residence life. Except for a few “other nerds,” most of her colleagues dismissed her efforts, stating, “Why did you waste your time? Like, you spent an evening doing that?” In these moments, Ash sensed her identity as a “nerd,” “geek,” and “learner” were “not part of the culture, and how people operated in student affairs,” which conflicted with her core needs. Despite these issues, Ash stayed in SA as it allowed her to weather several “moves” across the East Coast, Midwest, and West Coast for her now husband’s career. Given her need for stability, she explained, “staying in student affairs was an easy option to make sure that I was continuing to be employed during that time.”

Slowly, Ash realized “there aren’t many dean of students around.” Unlike graduate school, her time in SA taught her “there will be hundreds of student affairs professionals, only one Dean of Students for [a] campus.” So, Ash resolved to “be a director of a center” instead.

In her last SA role, Ash remembered a lack of supervisory support that strained her work, health, and plans to have children. As the person responsible for room reservations, she recalled being “expected to respond…immediately” despite her attempts to advocate for herself with her

supervisor by sharing "research on ways to do focused work and be effective." Unfortunately, her workload doubled after losing a staff assistant in a nonrenewable role. Tired, Ash thought to herself, "I will always be just, like, so dedicated to work because the university is so intensive all the time, no matter almost what role I'm in, it's very demanding." Though Ash felt "blocked" from doing her job well, she advocated for herself again by drafting a position description to split her work between a director and a coordinator role. Even though Ash already fulfilled both roles, her supervisor told her she would "have to apply for the [director] job."

At this time, Ash also started "infertility treatments" with her husband as they "were having trouble getting pregnant." "I had a lengthy miscarriage earlier in the year that was very traumatizing and terrible," she recounted. Her efforts to prioritize family planning alongside the job application grew complex when she also became the target of workplace bullying involving another colleague. Sadly, Ash's supervisor "victim-blamed" her. She told Ash, "It's your responsibility to handle this bullying situation. You're not going to get the director job if you don't handle it." Ash was in a "bind," unable to make a "formal complaint" with human resources (HR) out of caution for the director job. She felt "defeated and bad" and "burned out and angry." "I found myself in an extremely toxic environment and actually had two doctors tell me that I need to quit my job because it was negatively impacting my health," she recalled. To be safe, she began to look for other SA jobs but felt limited as she was location bound.

A pivotal turning point came when Ash's supervisor accused her of lying on her resume, rejecting her application for the director position. Ash, "livid," left the meeting after telling her supervisor, "I'm going to use some paid time off. I will let you know when I'm going to be back in the office." During the days following the meeting, Ash felt "rage," "angry," and "hurt." "I went for some very long runs on those days," she admitted. The day Ash returned to work, her

car broke down on the highway, symbolizing a greater breakdown in her career trajectory. After catching a ride from a colleague, she met with her supervisor and an HR representative, whom she requested to be present. She provided her supervisor with a two-week notice and asked HR to document her supervisor's "inappropriate" actions. Ash would only work five more days, which included a bittersweet going away party she requested to say bye to students. Soon, messages from students and campus colleagues filled her inbox and phone, stating, "'We're so sad you're leaving.' 'What happened,' … 'What in the world? I thought you'd be here forever.'"

In the six months after her exit, Ash channeled her energy into writing, sought support, and prioritized her well-being to recover from the toxicity of her last SA role. Ash "quit without a plan." "Well, my plan was to…write fiction. That was my kind of side hustle, fun hobby thing that I do," she explained. Given her joy for writing and publishing experience while in SA, she sought something "totally different" to address her exhaustion. She told herself, "I'm gonna go work for myself and I'm just gonna write novels for the rest of my life."

Even as she busied herself with fiction writing, the period following her exit from SA was riddled with questions and "confusion" over "the role ambiguity" in her life. She found herself asking, "Who am I? What kind of work do I do? What is my role? How am I contributing to society?" Unlike the other storytellers who had begun to grapple with these questions before leaving SA, Ash was only starting to explore them now given her unanticipated transition.

Ash utilized varying support to address these questions. Her husband's career stability afforded her time to write, undergo her first round of IVF treatment, and run a half-marathon. "It was amazing. It was lovely, it was so healing and just fun, and my husband and I went back packing a bunch. …because I wasn't focusing really hard on finding a new job, it was a really great chance to just find myself again and relax and spend some good time," she said. A weekly

writing group helped her complete a novel. Ash also made phone calls to KS, whom she met through the SA Expatriates Facebook group. KS led conversations in the Facebook group "about what is actually going on in the [SA] field. And what does diversity in student affairs mean? And how are we building this community, and how are we holding ourselves back?" Ash also used text threads with three of her closest friends from her SA master's program to share, "This is where I'm at. This is what's going on. I'm so stressed, I'm so sad." Finally, Ash went on walks with a friend from her last SA job who was also planning to leave SA.

Online job sites also helped Ash navigate her career change. One day, when Ash checked her "LinkedIn Inbox," she saw a high-performance computing (HPC) "role that took all of [her] experiences from student affairs." According to Ash:

> It was as though someone had taken my student affairs resume and plunked it down in the field that I had never heard of before. …going through the position description, I was like, 'well event management, working with students, and running a summer program, …I can do all of these things.'

Of course, she still wondered whether she was "ready to be working for anybody yet." To research HPC, she leaned again on her husband given his computer science background. The interview process felt "low stakes." Ash felt she'd be fine without the job as she had been "enjoying the writing stuff." In the end, Ash had a "magical interview process." She learned, "These are all nerdy people like me. They're excited about research and understanding how things work and supporting students as they learn how things work." Ash was delighted to find a new place to "exist and thrive." After receiving and accepting the job offer, she began the role with a $15,000 increase compared to her last SA role, which grew to $35,000 in five years.

Once in the role, Ash had to learn about HPC research, supervision, and grant-writing. Given her lack of experience with computer science and atmospheric research, Ash spent her first-year learning terminology. After a quick promotion, Ash had to also address employee job performance issues, culminating in a challenging decision to lay off two supervisees, marking one of the most demanding periods of her new career. She also had to learn grant-writing to secure National Science Foundation funds for one of her supervisees, which was "stressful." Ash was also responsible for fostering organizational change through DEI trainings, which were both rewarding and challenging. She was finally doing the work she had desired but had to figure out how to get scientists who privilege "empirical evidence" to "care about diversity and inclusion."

Ash took time to adjust to the improved changes her new work brought to her quality of life. Laughing, she remembered being shocked to learn that 40-hour work weeks meant 40-hour work weeks in her new organization. People made sure she wasn't "overwhelmed," and she could "shift the work around" as needed. Ash's organization also paid for her doctoral program in interdisciplinary leadership studies and released five hours of work for school. While she still felt "more pressure" because she was "pregnant and/or nursing during the entire doctoral program," the pressure never matched the intensity of SA where she "never knew when something was going to happen" or was "woken up in the middle of the night" for emergencies. "I was working a lot on school, but it was a contemplative practice," she remembered.

Interestingly, Ash continued to identify as an SA professional in the HPC organization to navigate the questions her transition raised about who she is, the work she does, and her societal contributions. "In the first couple of years [with the HPC organization], I was a student affairs professional, who was in an adjacent role," she explained. Ash even began a SA graduate student practicum in the HPC organization to "educate student affairs professionals in training about

other things that they can do with their careers," mirroring Veronica's efforts. These interns did a range of adjacent work, such as helping run STEM student internship programs, alumni outreach, student DEI trainings, and exhibit curations. Ash intentionally recruited SA graduate students with advertisements that read, "you'll be supervised by someone with student affairs experience." She admitted to me, "I was still in that, like, I am a student affairs professional in a different place mindset." While Ash figured out who she was, her work, and her contributions, the SA interns learned from her that "student affairs matter in STEM too." In graduate practicum meetings, SA faculty told Ash, "This is so unique. This is such a great experience. We're so glad that our students found you. This is going to make it so easy for them to find a job because they've got something different than everybody else."

Gradually, Ash shed her SA identity to embrace her longstanding desire to be a DEI educator and learner. Ash came to see the SA professional identity as rooted in the norms of "upper, middle class, white male administrators of universities," echoing Sallee's (2021) critique of ideal worker norms in SA. "It feels like the patriarchy… 'if I can get you to take on this thing as a key part of your identity, I can use you,'" she remarked. Ash added:

> [A]s I stayed in the [HPC organization], and I was really taking on that role of diversity inclusion trainer and making change and developing real relationships at minority serving institutions…it kind of broadened my sense of what my professional self was beyond just a cog in [the] student affairs machine.

As one of the few women in her organization, Ash was considered "minority enough to actually do the DEI work." She fulfilled the DEI work by establishing an "intensive" "four-month" "cohort-based" "diversity and inclusion training for the organization" on "privilege, gender, race, and bystander intervention." Ash also felt her identities as "nerd" and "learner" were valued in

the new research organization, where "they are all about learning all the time." Ash also served on the "inclusivity committee" for an international conference, where she co-authored "an inclusive scientific meetings document" and "instituted massive change." Ash remarked:

> Finally, being allowed to actually do diversity and inclusion work as a white woman was like a weight off my shoulders, like, this is what I care about. This is, this is a core part of who I am, and I'm not being allowed to do it there [in SA]. But, now here at the [HPC organization] I can finally actually do that part of my professional self.

In executing her DEI work responsibilities, Ash had the support of her supervisor and the Chief Diversity officer. Ash's supervisor, "an old white guy" and a "former submarine officer" was beloved by many historically Black colleges and universities for his STEM career outreach efforts. Ash enjoyed his mentorship. Further, the Chief Diversity Officer, a Black woman, served as an "incredible source of support" for Ash's "questions and issues." Ash valued that both saw her as a DEI "expert." These supportive relationships pushed Ash to approach her work with "humility" by no longer trying to "download information into people" and to instead use "coaching, questioning" tactics to educate white men in HPC and STEM spaces.

Ash's career change into an HPC organization also provided a paid doctoral education, that helped Ash further secure her core needs and goals. Her interdisciplinary doctoral program's focus on "leadership" "organizations" and "supporting human beings in the work they do," "reinforced" for her that "there's no one path for careers." She learned that "leadership is so transferable" from her classmates, a "nun, a fire chief, a four-star general, a manager at an itty-bitty little bank in the middle of nowhere." With this new knowledge, she troubled the "pipeline" or a "leaky pipe" metaphors used in STEM careers, noting their lack of "agency." Through her career change, she came to see her career as a highway. "There are on ramps and off ramps

throughout your career. You come on. You get on the highway of student affairs. You realize it's not the right place. You take a pit stop to fiction writing for a summer, you on ramp into HPC." In this career metaphor, Ash clarified that the "car" represented a person's various needs, assembled often in childhood. "Like, you build this child, this car of, you know, the autism, the alcoholism, the poverty, all of that, …that all comes with you on the journey."

Pleased with her HPC work, Ash committed herself to the "goal of telling people about student affairs adjacent roles" through online spaces and internships. "People became more familiar with what the [SA] master's degree was" after Ash joined the HPC organization. Over time, Ash was joined by eleven other former SA professionals. "The [HPC] organization is valuing our skills, but also, as we get more people, we're recruiting our own good folx," Ash explained about how she used the online "expats group" to advertise jobs. Relatedly, Ash participated in the YouTube panel because it offered "virtual education" in the absence of career change discussions among SA professional conferences, graduate programs, and the "regular Student Affairs Professional Facebook group." As an example of this absence, Ash had worked with a SA graduate student intern on a conference "program application to NASPA…for him to talk about his experiences working for us in like, you know, student affairs adjacent roles." The proposal was "denied" "hard." The program reviewers stated, "This is not appropriate for our conference. We don't want to be talking about other places people could go." Yet, Ash felt it is a "disservice not to have the conversation. And it's leaving people leaving the field hating it because they felt so unsupported, they felt unprepared." "It's better for the future of the [SA] field if people can leave on good terms. And that's not what's happening," she added.

In the YouTube panel, Ash emphasized two of her career change lessons. First, "you never know what life is going to bring you" so there is value in knowing "what the skills are that

you're using, so that you can find another role, if that's what you need to do." For Ash, the transferability of SA skills (e.g., event planning, student programming, etc.) offered her agency in the face of poor SA workplace conditions and life's unpredictability. Second, given Ash's gradual shift out of an SA identity, she wanted to relay that "your work is not your identity." By separating the SA work from personal identity, she hoped to restore her and others' sense of worth, which may be shaken during a career change. Ash elaborated:

> Changing roles and making different decisions does not make you less valuable. It does not make you less of a professional or human contributing to the future of the world. Whatever it is that drives you in SA, it does not go away when you do it somewhere else.

By detangling personal identity and worth from SA, Ash was able to prioritize her DEI goals regardless of her work setting.

In tandem, Ash continued to wrestle with her SA career trajectory and identity. For Ash, the online term used by former SA professionals, SA expatriate, evoked multiple meanings. Expatriate, for Ash, recognized that "student affairs is a key part of who she is as a professional and how it has been a huge part of her personal development." Yet, she also maintained that "expatriate feels a little bit like cutting off that part," which continued to shape her new work.

Between our interviews, Ash began another major transition, this time exiting the HPC organization for entrepreneurial work. Ash's HPC work unmasked her desire to "work for [herself]." Though Ash largely valued her HPC role and work conditions, an uptick in "working pressure" and a failed "promotion" opportunity that "would have helped to fix the gender pay gap on the team" with a "$60,000 pay increase" for her led her to reevaluate her work. During the promotion deliberations, Ash was "listening to a lot of coaching trainings and participating in some coaching," and she thought to herself, "I could do coaching all the time, and it would be

awesome, and I wouldn't have to worry about somebody pulling my salary." When the "pay increase" failed, she decided to depart. She thought to herself, "I can't do this work anymore because part of my job is to help fix the gender pay gap, and they wouldn't even fix it for me."

Following this period, Ash once again shifted her career trajectory, where she "can be [her] own boss and be responsible for [her] own salary and not have to deal with all of this ridiculous stuff." Ash clarified that "being an entrepreneur was never part of [her]…identity or plan." Still, she made the leap, following the "off ramp into taking another summer off" before taking the ramp into "coaching and consulting work."

Between our interviews, Ash has been "focusing on slowing down" again. She noted:

> I'm going to try and keep [work] to a 30-hour week. That's the goal just because…I want that quality of life. I want to be able to walk the kids to school in the morning…and be able to schedule that into my life without having to worry about major consequences.

She continued, adding:

> I want to be able to manage my own time and my own life. I know with consulting within the year or two I'll be able to make more money than I was doing in student affairs. …I hopefully will be able to do that with full control over my [time]. And that is so free. It's such a lovely place to be knowing that I'll be able to care for my family in so many more ways than just monetary. And, I'll have emotional space left to also care for them.

To support this decision, Ash aimed to build on her experiences in the "inclusive [STEM] conferences space" by "assess[ing] the inclusivity of conferences." Ash also planned to finish up and use her "executive coaching certification" for "inclusive" "leadership coaching" for white men and to separately use her doctoral research to support "minorities in STEM." Again, a commitment to DEI drove Ash's career decisions and goals.

Unlike her exit from SA, Ash felt more settled in life now and hoped to cope with another career change with planning and support. Ash stated:

> I am leaving under much better mental straights than I was last time. …I [have] my doctorate now. I have two beautiful children. I have an amazing relationship at home. You know, life is much better than it was the last time I left…and I bounced back pretty amazingly from that. So, it was much less scary the second time.

Ash also continued to enjoy her husband's support, and both have planned their finances for the transition. "We have a lot of money saved up…we've decreased spending…and we've really been able to prepare for it," she said. Her "amazing [HPC] supervisor," who also has a tech and coding business, has offered to "step back in as a mentor again and help [her] figure out the entrepreneur thing." Further, Ash still employed the online SA expat space for encouragement into how "other [former] student affairs professionals…have just massive improvements of quality in life." Finally, Ash felt she could use "some of the student affairs skills…with what [she] learned working in [HPC]," such as her strength as a "developer," to start her business. Ash ended by sharing our interviews were "insightful" to her, allowing her to reflect on her "growth."

Ash's Career Change Summary

Like the other storytellers, Ash's positionality as a white heterosexual woman and self-described nerd, shaped by early experiences of lacking belonging and familial instability, led her to value stability, belonging, learning, and DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion). Initially, her early SA career met these core needs and values. However, as her career progressed, she felt a diminishing sense of belonging and involvement in DEI work. Ultimately, an unexpected turning point led her to abruptly leave SA without a plan. After a brief hiatus from the workforce focused

on health and exploring career paths, she found a new career in a high-performance computing (HPC) organization, which allowed her to address her core needs and values more fully.

Unlike the other storytellers, Ash experienced an unanticipated transition that culminated in a turning point. A toxic workplace environment, characterized by bullying, a lack of promotion, and inadequate supervisory support during a period of personal health challenges, reached a breaking point when Ash's supervisor accused her of fabricating her resume and work contributions. This confrontation led to her abrupt resignation without any future career plans. Given the unexpected nature of her departure, Ash left SA grappling with questions about her identity, her role in the workplace, and her contributions to society.

Confronted with the sudden and unanticipated nature of her departure from SA, Ash navigated her career change by initially taking a time out (Wise & Millward, 2005). This time out allowed her to recover from the toxic workplace conditions, explore various career paths, such as fiction writing, and prioritize her health and plans to have children with her partner through IVF treatments. During this time, she relied on online and in-person resources, such as a writing community and social connections with current and former SA colleagues over walks, texts, and online chats, which facilitated her healing and transition. Notably, her husband's career stability provided her with financial security, allowing her to navigate career change in a way other participants could not. Indeed, Ash's experience with varied resources illustrates the role of linked lives in supporting individuals' transition. Unexpectedly, LinkedIn also served as a crucial resource, helping Ash identify the HPC role she eventually transitioned into and the SA skills in event management and student programming she could leverage.

After securing her new HPC role, Ash initially faced constraints related to managing employee performance issues. However, with the support of her new supervisor, she was able to

overcome these obstacles. While she initially identified herself as an SA professional, she eventually separated her sense of work from her identity, defining herself more broadly as a learner and advocate for DEI in STEM spaces. In her new role and organization, she exercised her agency further by offering internship opportunities to graduate students in student affairs to learn about adjacent paths and recruiting former SA professionals to the organization.

Ash's new HPC organization shaped her transition through various resources and constraints. First, the HPC organization allowed Ash to find a greater sense of belonging and alignment with her DEI values. Second, Ash's new employer paid for her doctoral education, bolstering her career development. Finally, the HPC organization provided improved work-life integration, allowing her to prioritize her health, family, and studies. However, the HPC organization also introduced constraints that made adjusting to the career difficult in the long term. An increased workload and a failed promotion in the HPC organization eventually led her to another career pivot after several years with the organization. When we ended our second interview, she was once again experiencing change.

CHAPTER 10: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to explore the career change experiences of former student affairs professionals to expand the student affairs (SA) empirical research and public scholarship on career transitions. As previously noted in Chapters 1 and 2, current SA career transition studies examine SA practitioners' career changes to other campus positions, like faculty, and the public scholarship by former SA professionals ignores the role of diverse positionalities in shaping their career change experience. As such, I examined the career changes of former SA professionals who left campus-based positions for adjacent or new industries and held diverse positionalities. To do this, I used a story methodology to generate and restory field texts about the career change experience with five former SA professionals.

This discussion chapter highlights the key themes and common takeaways across the stories. I synthesize findings from the previous five chapters specific to the study's research question and interpretive framework of life course perspectives. Throughout my synthesis, I detail how the findings confirm or complicate the literature discussed in chapter two.

I argue that former SA professionals experienced career change based on the interaction between their early lives and career turning points, external settings and actors, and individual decisions, reflecting their diverse positionalities. Specifically, I will discuss three common findings that emerged from my synthesis. Using three sections, I detail how each finding answers my research question: How did former student affairs professionals experience their career change? In the first section, Career Needs, Values, and Turning Points, I present the interplay between storytellers' career needs and values from early life and the turning points in their student affairs career that drove their decision to change careers. In the second section, Constraints and Resources, I discuss three social contexts (i.e., the student affairs profession,

family and community, and new workplaces) and the linked lives in these contexts that shaped storytellers' career change through constraints and resources. In the third section, Exercising Agency, I address storytellers' efforts to plan their career change and support others. Following this, I close the chapter with study contributions, recommendations for future research, implications for practice, and limitations. Altogether, I call on the SA field to meet its diverse workforce's evolving career development needs and to improve careers for those who choose to remain in SA by further studying and recognizing career changes beyond campus education.

Career Needs, Values, and Turning Points

One way storytellers experienced career change was through the interplay of career needs and values shaped in early life and turning points in their student affairs careers. Storytellers' early life informed career needs and values of stability, consistency, support, well-being, agency, and inclusion, partly driving their decision to enter, navigate, and ultimately leave student affairs for a new career. Key turning points involving concerns about salary, workplace exclusion, privileged students, work-life integration, and supervisors illuminated the mismatch between their needs and values and SA work, finalizing their decision to pursue a career change.

Career needs and values from individuals' early lives partly drove their decision to change careers. Josephine, Andrew, and Ash lived through precarity and marginalization related to their childhood, families, and identities (i.e., race, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic background, family composition, or first-generation status). Josephine's experiences with poverty and government assistance in childhood as a Black girl drove her to seek safety, security, and consistency in her career, which she initially found in student affairs with the guidance of residence life professionals she met in college. Student affairs afforded Josephine material safety, like free on-campus housing, and social safety from Black Queer women who supported her as

she explored and formed her Queer identity. In finding safety, security, and consistency in entry- and graduate-level student affairs roles, Josephine aspired to support college students with similar needs as hers through a student affairs career.

In like manner, for Andrew, who grew up in a chaotic home with divorced parents while struggling with his identity as a gay teen, stability, predictability, and support emerged as needs from early life that student affairs fulfilled. During college, student affairs professionals and mentors supported Andrew's identity as a gay man while also challenging him to examine his white privilege. Despite his initial interest in a faculty career, Andrew's conversations with family, sociology professors, and student affairs mentors about careers following the Great Recession led him to decide that a student affairs career could meet his needs for stability and predictability than a faculty career. Like Josephine and Andrew, Ash's early life, marked by family struggles with mental health and alcoholism, led her to seek stability, which she initially found in student affairs with the guidance of residence life staff.

Although Veronica and Danilo did not disclose childhood precarity like the others, they still detailed how their early life and work experiences directed their career decisions toward values of agency and well-being. As a young Black woman, Veronica's family told her to create a "set of circumstances where you can do what you want to do, when you want to do it, and you are not beholden to any circumstances or place that does not suit you." This value for agency initially drove Veronica to a residence life job as she desired to be independent of her parents after college rather than specific career goals. Further, while Veronica's parents had financial privilege, they still told her to view a career as a means to pay the bills more than a calling, leading her to value financial well-being in her career decisions. In parallel, Danilo's career

decisions grew to include well-being as a value, which he embraced in his first student affairs job in commuter services, where he enjoyed time for triathlons and his marriage outside of work.

Notably, all five storytellers discussed how their early life experiences with belonging and marginalization within their families, schools, initial workplaces, and communities instilled a value of inclusion, shaping their career decisions. For instance, Danilo's parents exposed him early on to public service to address the exploitation of Black and Brown individuals in his communities. Danilo's exposure to the Black church instilled an ethos of lifting others up. These values of justice and service from early life initially motivated him to leave a career in the corporate sector for a student affairs career. Similarly, Ash recounted how her experiences with a lack of belonging in her family as one of the only girls, familial homophobia directed at her favorite aunt, and a secondary school presentation on differences led her to value diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). The chance to foster inclusion drew Ash to a student affairs career. Likewise, Andrew noted how the influence of activists from childhood and his later involvement with student activism in support of LGBT students in college inspired him to contribute to social change through a student affairs career.

Altogether, the storytellers were initially driven to and remained in a student affairs career due to their needs and values, all of which stemmed from early life experiences. However, as storytellers' careers progressed, they grew concerned with certain aspects of student affairs. While some concerns were unique to storytellers (i.e., Ash's inability to secure DEI roles as a heterosexual white woman), they also experienced common concerns involving (1) salary, (2) workplace exclusion, (3) privileged students, (4) work-life integration, and (5) supervisors. Most notably, these concerns conflicted with storytellers' early life needs and values.

For instance, Veronica felt underpaid and financially exploited throughout her career in student affairs, starting with her first residence life job, where she learned that she and her colleagues qualified for public assistance due to their low wages. Veronica's salary challenges in her first residence life job made her acutely aware of the financial privilege she previously enjoyed under her parents. This awareness and persistent salary issues throughout her student affairs career conflicted with her value for financial well-being as a Black woman.

Further, Veronica, Josephine, and Danilo all recounted experiences of workplace exclusion at predominantly white elite institutions as Black student affairs professionals. Danilo, for example, felt undermined in his efforts to change campus events with racist origins by white alums and students from Greek organizations. Such instances made Danilo question whether he could enact values of justice and service through a student affairs career.

Relatedly, Danilo, Veronica, and Andrew noted their struggles to prioritize systemically underrepresented students since the policies and practices at their institutions catered to white, wealthy students. Andrew struggled to fulfill his value of social change at an elite institution where he felt pressured to direct student leadership programs towards neoliberal aims. Additionally, like the others, Danilo noted that his work in student activities required late night and overnight commitments, creating conflict with his value of well-being, including time with his wife. Finally, all storytellers, except for Josephine, reported issues with supervisors. For instance, Veronica reported negative experiences with multiple supervisors, one of whom lacked a culturally relevant approach to supervising Black women and another who lacked knowledge of student affairs, conflicting with her values of inclusion and agency.

At first, all storytellers tried to address their concerns with student affairs through job changes, institutional moves, or promotion opportunities. With hindsight, most admitted to

looking at jobs in student affairs because they feared leaving what they knew for the unknown. For instance, though disappointed with work-life integration issues and student violence, Josephine continued to search for student affairs jobs because she felt that was her only option, and her "fear" of the "unknown" stoked her early core needs for safety and security.

Ultimately, storytellers' concerns culminated in turning points within their student affairs career, finalizing their decision to leave and pursue a new career to fulfill their needs and values. While some turning points featured objectively significant events or actors, others entailed beliefs "infused with great significance by an individual on the brink of change" (Ibarra, 2006, p. 7). In the end, turning points represented the culmination of persistent concerns with salary, workplace exclusion, privileged students, work-life integration, and supervisors in student affairs, finalizing storytellers' exit decisions for a path aligned with their needs and values.

For example, Andrew experienced a change in a campus human resources policy that removed the overtime protections he felt helped him balance the burnout and lack of work-life integration in his student affairs role. For Ash, a negative encounter with her supervisor, who accused her of lying about her job materials for an internal promotion she was already fulfilling, pushed her to submit her resignation, ending her tenure in student affairs. For Andrew and Ash, who grew up with instability in childhood, these turning points contradicted their need for stability and consistency, which they no longer believed student affairs could meet.

Additionally, Veronica grew tired of managing "white tears" at a historically white elite higher education institution while leaders compensated and promoted white men to senior student affairs roles readily. This turning point activated Veronica's values of agency, financial well-being, and inclusion. Similarly, Danilo's conversation with a Black woman colleague about the lack of Black professionals in student affairs and the incongruence between his desire to have

children and the demands of student affairs work marked a turning point in his career trajectory. This conversation confirmed Danilo's belief that his desire for well-being as a Black man was incompatible with a student affairs path.

Among the storytellers, Josephine's turning points were unique. Josephine did not directly tie her first turning point to concerns about student affairs. Instead, a chance encounter with a former student affairs professional revealed that career change was an option. Subsequently, Josephine's last turning point was more in line with the others. Her experience as an Interim Dean of Students solidified her concerns about work-life integration and the short shelf-life of professionals in senior student affairs roles. Both turning points helped Josephine realize a new career could meet her need for stability outside of student affairs.

This finding confirms prior evidence and public accounts by highlighting that factors involving salary, workplace exclusion, privileged students, work-life integration, supervisors, and external actors drive individuals' decisions to leave student affairs for new careers (Buchanan & Shupp, 2015; Dos, 2021; Edwards, 2022; Marshall et al., 2016; Martinez et al., 2020; NASPA, 2022; Naifeh & Kearney, 2021; Tull, 2006; Williams, 2019; Walton, 2022; West, 2021). At the same time, this finding complicates the student affairs attrition literature and public scholarship on career changes (e.g., Brown & Trudell, 2019; Frank, 2013), which primarily consider the individual and professional factors driving individuals' decisions to leave student affairs without considering the context of their early lives and career decision-making. This finding showed that storytellers' early life experiences with home, family, school, work, college, and identities also directed their decision to change careers to fulfill their enduring needs and values of stability, consistency, support, well-being, agency, and inclusion. This insight suggests that how individuals experience career change, mainly their reasons for leaving student affairs

and pursuing new work, cannot be understood only by considering workplace concerns or turning points towards the end of their career trajectory in student affairs. Instead, individuals' decisions to change careers were driven by how the workplace concerns and turning points resonated with their deeply held values and needs from their early lives. In essence, storytellers experienced career change not only as turning points but also by their significance within the broader context of their lives.

Constraints and Resources: Social Contexts and Linked Lives

A second way storytellers experienced career change was through the influence of social contexts, including their linked lives with colleagues, supervisors, mentors, family, and friends in these contexts. Josephine, Andrew, Danilo, Veronica, and Ash specified three social contexts that shaped their career change experiences through specific constraints and resources: the student affairs profession, home and community, and new workplaces. Storytellers experienced the following constraints from the student affairs profession and their new workplaces that challenged their career change: a lack of information, disapproval from colleagues and mentors, skepticism, and exclusion. Concurrently, storytellers experienced the following resources from the three social contexts that facilitated their career change: supportive colleagues, transferable skills and knowledge, financial assistance, informational support, networking, work-life integration, social support, and professional growth opportunities. Below, I use the three social contexts storytellers noted to organize the discussion of this finding.

The Student Affairs Profession

The stories highlighted that the social context of student affairs, including the linked lives of storytellers and their colleagues, mentors, and supervisors, shaped storytellers' career change experience through constraints and resources. Storytellers experienced two constraints in the

student affairs field that shaped their transition: a lack of information and disapproval from colleagues and mentors. The storytellers also discussed two resources in the student affairs field that aided their transition: supportive colleagues and transferable skills and knowledge. While prior public scholarship has covered most of these constraints and resources (Scheibler, 2017; Hoffman & Studdert, 2021a; Smith, 2020; Wellhouser, 2016), this study adds to the scholarship by highlighting the role of supportive colleagues from student affairs in facilitating transitions.

One constraint storytellers faced was a lack of information about career changes in student affairs. All storytellers perceived a scarcity of discussions about career change in online spaces, like the Student Affairs Facebook group, and among professional associations, like ACPA (College Student Educators International) and NASPA (Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education). For instance, Danilo, who initially transitioned into student affairs from a sales career, indicated that, unlike other sectors, student affairs did not help build up professionals to be competitive for other industries or help individuals identify "what skill(s) they bring to the table" in terms of a career change. Danilo felt the absence of career change discussions in the student affairs field was "nefarious," "disingenuous," and "dishonest." Andrew echoed Danilo's sentiment, observing that professional associations, which are the pillars of the student affairs profession, are more interested in the needs of managers and graduate programs than those of labor. To this end, Ash and Veronica experienced resistance when attempting to submit presentation proposals about their career change experiences at the annual NASPA conferences. While encountering challenges with NASPA, Veronica found success in presenting about adjacent careers at ACPA. Veronica attributed this difference in receptivity to the identities of the leaders and members of ACPA, who tended to be more "young women, LGBT friendly…more progressive" and, as such, "open to this idea of multiple pathways to success."

In addition to limited information, the disapproval of colleagues, supervisors, and mentors created another constraint for storytellers, demonstrating the power of linked lives in influencing storytellers' career change. For example, once Danilo started to shift his career by first taking a job outside of student affairs for another campus-based role, his student affairs mentors disapproved of his decision to change careers. Danilo perceived that his mentors were angry with him and did not respect his decision because they refused to meet him after his campus transition. Even further, one of his mentors, a senior student affairs leader on campus, failed to provide Danilo with a letter of support he requested for his search for work in K–12 education. Likewise, Josephine and Veronica faced disapproval from colleagues when discussing their career plans. Josephine shared that no one talked about getting out of student affairs, and colleagues treated any discussion or curiosity about leaving with accusations that professionals were not committed to students. Veronica also noted that people on "campus aren't going to tell you [about career changes] or help" with the transition. Even after Veronica left student affairs, she noted that the professionals she networked with at student affairs conferences as a part of her adjacent career in college access nonprofits were often confused by her attendance, which echoes prior challenges disclosed in public scholarship (Scheibler, 2017; Smith, 2020).

In contrast to Danilo, Josephine, and Veronica, Andrew did not experience explicit disapproval from colleagues, but he internalized a sense of judgment. Upon leaving student affairs, Andrew felt a sense of obligation towards his mentors, especially as they had prepared him for challenges in student affairs. He grappled with feelings of guilt and shame as he considered the unfulfilled expectations of his mentors, underscoring prior scholarship on the complex emotional and social dimensions of leaving higher education (Elue & Simula, 2023).

The limited discussion and disapproval surrounding career changes beyond campus positions are concerning for at least two reasons. First, as storytellers noted, this lack of information and understanding can hinder individuals' ability to envision alternative careers and adjust to the transition process. Second, the disapproval experienced by student affairs colleagues can exacerbate feelings of shame, isolation, and grief associated with the transition (Elue & Simula, 2023). Ash observed that in a field where professionals "have to talk to students about career changes," it seems to be a "disservice not to have the conversation" with professionals, adding, "It's leaving people leaving the field hating it because they felt so unsupported." Indeed, the storytellers' experiences challenge the field's commitment to professional career development and support, indicating a disconnect between the values espoused by student affairs and the career change experiences of former student affairs professionals.

In addition to constraints, storytellers highlighted resources from the student affairs field that shaped their career change. One resource included supportive colleagues from the student affairs field who helped storytellers navigate their career changes. This finding extends the public scholarship by elaborating on the role of supportive colleagues in facilitating transitions (Brown & Trudell, 2019; Edwards, 2022; Studdert & Hoffman, 2021). For instance, Ash found emotional support from student affairs colleagues she met in graduate school and others who, like her, had or planned to leave student affairs. Ash discussed her sadness and worry with these colleagues during her transition. Further, student affairs and higher education supervisors and mentors provided valuable support by initiating networking opportunities and sharing job leads. For instance, Josephine enjoyed the support of a Woman of Color (WOC) supervisor. As the Vice President of Student Affairs (VPSA), Josephine's supervisor simultaneously pushed to retain her while supporting her wishes to pursue a human resources career. For instance, the

VPSA supported Josephine's career change by approving her human resources certification class, permitting her to leave work early for the class, serving as a reference, and celebrating her job offer. Additionally, a former residence life professional who had successfully transitioned to human resources provided Josephine with invaluable support throughout her transition with job and networking leads, interview preparation, coaching, and skill development.

The support of a student affairs supervisor is a unique and underrepresented resource in the public scholarship and the student affairs-to-faculty career change literature (Edwards, 2022; Hoffman & Studdert, 2021b; Martinez et al., 2020; Perry et al., 2019; Scheibler, 2017). While the scholarship and even Danilo's story point to constraints posed by actors in the field, Josephine's story showcases the power of supportive supervisory relationships. Despite Josephine's eventual career change, Josephine attributed her extended tenure in student affairs to the encouragement and inclusive leadership of her WOC VPSA. This evidence suggests that instead of a zero-sum approach to retention in student affairs, some leaders and supervisors may endeavor to simultaneously retain and meet the evolving career needs of their diverse workforce.

The final resource that facilitated storytellers' career change was their transferable skills and knowledge from student affairs, specifically their organizational management and human relations skills and working knowledge of higher education and student development, confirming existing public scholarship on the value of student affairs skills in the career change process (Brown & Trudell, 2019; Eng, 2020). All storytellers emphasized that the organizational management skills they gained in the student affairs profession helped them identify and adapt to their new careers. Storytellers discussed how their previous student affairs roles in complex higher education organizations bolstered their ability to navigate organizational systems, policies, and change. For instance, Andrew shared that his supervisor hired him because of his

experiences with organizational chaos in his last student affairs role. Andrew learned to leverage negative organizational experiences in student affairs to execute his adjacent work promoting organizational change in community colleges. Similarly, Josephine used her organizational management skills from student affairs, like information management, systems development, and policy creation, to fulfill hiring and benefits-related projects in her human resources role. Further, Josephine, Danilo, and Ash discussed combining organizational management and human relations skills from student affairs to motivate and support employees in their new workplaces. Danilo, for instance, explained that student affairs helped him understand what it felt like to be the "least powerful position, person in whatever room" and still navigate "change," which he leveraged to support his direct reports. From student affairs, Danilo also learned to navigate organizational policies and politics by thinking analytically.

Lastly, for Andrew, Danilo, Veronica, and Ash, who pursued adjacent careers, knowledge of higher education institutions and student development was valued in their new roles. Veronica noted that with student affairs experience, she could find adjacent work in college-access nonprofits. Veronica's supervisors valued her technical, industry-specific knowledge of higher education and student development as the only person with student affairs and higher education background in her nonprofits. Moreover, Veronica frequently leveraged her prior connections in student affairs to support her work with students in her adjacent career. These stories, in addition to the public scholarship, provide evidence for Carpenter et al.'s (1987) suggestion "that student affairs education and experience can have salutary effects even if an individual opts out or is forced out of the field" (p. 7).

Home and Community

The stories shared by storytellers detailed the financial, informational, and networking resources they experienced during their career change because of their linked lives with partners, parents, and peers in home and community social contexts. The importance of home and community resources is well-documented in student affairs career transition and broader career change scholarship (Howes & Goodman-Delahunty, 2014; Kuk et al., 2012; Lancaster, 2005). Notably, storytellers did not share constraints from their home and community contexts.

After abruptly leaving student affairs and exiting the workforce, Ash relied on her husband for financial assistance and computer science knowledge, which afforded her time to think through her next steps and, eventually, secure a role in a high-performance computing organization. Along the way, Ash also found a community of writers who helped her explore and obtain insights about a potential career in fiction writing. Similarly, Danilo relied on his father's experience with career change from law to church pastorship to guide his decision-making.

In addition to the family, all storytellers elaborated on how informational and networking resources from online communities aided their transitions, specifically the Expatriates of Student Affairs Facebook group and LinkedIn. These accounts extend Brown and Trudell's (2019) recommendations by highlighting the critical role of the Expatriates of Student Affairs Facebook community in offering informational and networking resources to professionals seeking change. The Facebook group addressed the lack of information on career changes in the student affairs field. For instance, Josephine was excited to find the Expatriates of Student Affairs Facebook group, which helped her learn about the experiences of others who had successfully transitioned out of student affairs. Similarly, for Andrew, this online Facebook community provided reassurance "that people do leave" and boosted his confidence to change paths. Ash was the most

involved in the Facebook community, forming friendships with others, which helped her process her decision to leave student affairs and chart a new path. Additionally, Veronica and Ash also highlighted the critical role of the online professional networking site, LinkedIn, in helping them find their first jobs outside of higher education. Veronica noted that LinkedIn had been integral to her career movement as she had no clue where to look for adjacent careers. In addition to experiencing career change based on the student affairs, family, and community contexts, storytellers discussed the constraints and resources of their new workplace(s) following their departure from student affairs, which is discussed below and completes this second finding.

New Workplaces

In the stories Josephine, Andrew, Danilo, Veronica, and Ash shared, new workplace(s) and colleagues and supervisors within these new social contexts also presented additional constraints and resources that shaped storytellers' career change. Storytellers experienced two constraints in their new workplaces that shaped their transition: skepticism and exclusion. While public scholarship has covered skepticism (Loucy, 2015; Smith, 2020), experiences of exclusion in new workplaces have received little coverage, which may be especially relevant to prospective career changers in student affairs who hold systematically marginalized identities (e.g., Davis, 2022; Studdert & Hoffman, 2022). The storytellers also discussed three resources in their new workplaces that aided their transition: work-life integration, social support, and professional growth opportunities, which confirm prior evidence and public accounts (Edwards, 2022; Frank, 2013; Marshall et al., 2016; Williams, 2019; Studdert & Hoffman, 2021).

Skepticism among colleagues in new workplaces emphasized the role of linked lives in shaping the career change experience through constraints. Danilo, Veronica, Ash, and Andrew noted that colleagues in their new workplaces in adjacent sectors were unfamiliar with their

higher education and student affairs backgrounds. As such, some of their colleagues initially questioned the decision of the respective workplace to hire a former student affairs professional, extending prior accounts of career changers who faced skepticism from hiring managers in adjacent higher education companies despite their background (Loucy, 2015; Smith, 2020). In her second adjacent workplace, Veronica was met with suspicion by colleagues for being an external hire. Danilo's and Ash's colleagues also expressed skepticism about hiring someone outside the organization versus promoting someone from within.

The final constraint storytellers experienced amidst their new workplace relationships with supervisors and colleagues included identity-related exclusion. For example, after leaving student affairs, where she had enjoyed the inclusive supervision of a WOC supervisor, Josephine entered a new workplace with predominantly white women. Josephine disclosed that her white woman supervisor prioritized an analysis of gender over an intersectional analysis of race, gender, and sexuality in a nonprofit serving survivors of family and childhood trauma. As the only Black Queer woman in the new workplace, Josephine asked her supervisor to connect her to Black women at other nonprofits to adjust to her new career in a predominantly white space. Likewise, Ash disclosed issues of gender pay inequity despite her leadership with diversity, equity, and inclusion education at a high-performance computing organization. These stories echo the SA-to-faculty career change literature, showing former student affairs professionals experience their career change based on organizational inequities and their identities of race, gender, and sexuality (Guillaume et al., 2020; Wallace & Ford, 2023). This finding is important as it adds to the limited discussion of how student affairs professionals experience career change beyond campus-based positions based on their identities (Edwards, 2022; Davis, 2022).

Storytellers also identified work-life integration as a valuable resource in their new workplaces that aided their adjustment to their new careers. Ash was surprised to find out in her new organization that 40 hours of work meant 40 hours of work. In comparison, Andrew's transition required him to shift to a "start-up mentality," involving a longer commute, unnecessary funder meetings, and increased work travel. However, he valued that his work was less intensive and provided more balance than student affairs. Andrew and Josephine appreciated that they were less emotionally, psychologically, and physically exhausted from their new workplaces following their transition. Having greater work-life integration helped Josephine realize that "work didn't have to be hard in order for it to feel like you're doing good work." Relatedly, Danilo and Veronica noted being busy yet having more agency and flexibility for their work in their new workplaces, which allowed them to experience being whole human beings and parents. For instance, while Veronica's second adjacent workplace required her to oversee a 10 million dollar budget and a team of 50 employees, often leading her to work 50 to 70 hours a week, her CEO's support allowed her to prioritize her parenting responsibilities before work when needed. These findings support Marshall et al. (2016), who found that while former student affairs professionals still worked very hard in their new careers and, in some cases, more hours, they felt their new work did not conflict with their personal goals.

The social support provided by colleagues and supervisors in new workplaces was another crucial resource for storytellers' career change. For Veronica and Ash, this social support specifically involved workplace inclusion practices. In her second adjacent role, Veronica detailed how her nonprofit's CEO, a Black woman, advanced an unapologetically Black organizational mission and valued employees through words of affirmation and pay equity that contrasted her experiences with university leaders and presidents. Further, in the same role,

Veronica reported to a supportive supervisor, a Black man, who pushed her to negotiate her salary with him since "Black women are always underpaid" and "do not advocate for themselves." Similarly, Ash noted receiving identity-based support as a white woman working in a high-performance computing organization from her supervisor, a white man. Like former student affairs practitioners transitioning to faculty careers (Perry et al., 2019; West, 2021, 2022), storytellers in this study benefited from culturally relevant mentoring and support.

Storytellers also indicated that professional growth opportunities in their new workplaces helped them further test and grow into their new careers by attaining skills and knowledge. For example, Andrew, Danilo, and Ash had opportunities to gain content knowledge from their new workplaces. Andrew taught himself about community colleges and philanthropy work, Ash learned about high-performance computing terminology, supervision, and grant writing, and Danilo grew his familiarity with K–12 compliance laws and policies. Moreover, Ash and Veronica secured support from their adjacent workplaces for their doctoral education. Ash, for instance, secured funding and release time from her new workplace for her doctoral studies in organizational leadership. Relatedly, storytellers' new workplaces provided opportunities for them to develop new skills that helped them further adjust to their career change. For instance, after realizing that her new colleagues were no more knowledgeable about human resources than she was, Josephine used her new role as an opportunity to develop human resources skills by tackling projects, such as updating the organization's retirement plan and hiring policies, which helped her grow confident in her career choice and transition.

Notably, through professional development opportunities in their new workplaces, storytellers gained more insights into their new careers, modified their future trajectories, and grew their sense of agency. For instance, Josephine, Andrew, and Ash experienced a new career

that allowed them to preserve their emotional energy for other parts of their lives, which they hoped to prioritize in their future career decisions. Through adjacent opportunities, Veronica realized that instead of biding her time in precarious student affairs roles before securing financial well-being, she could gain financial success and promotion earlier in her life. Veronica began to see her career as not linear but porous. She realized she could leave student affairs and return and likely be better positioned to advocate for her salary because changing careers gave her additional perspectives and skills. Similarly, Ash no longer saw her career as a single path or pipeline with leaks but as a highway of on- and off-ramps where she could assert her agency with pit stops. Like West (2021, 2022), who enjoyed more agency after leaving student affairs for a faculty career, these storytellers also felt more agentic due to the professional growth opportunities they experienced in their new workplaces outside of campus-based roles.

Finally, Veronica, Ash, and Andrew modified their career trajectories beyond their initial career change from student affairs due to the professional development opportunities and related perspectives they gained from their new workplaces. These ongoing transitions are notable as public scholarship ignores successive career changes and transitions that follow for some after leaving student affairs (e.g., Eng, 2020; Scheibler, 2017; Smith, 2020). For instance, Ash decided to leverage the doctoral degree and diversity, equity, and inclusion skills she acquired through her new workplace in high-performance computing to pursue entrepreneurial work after missing out on an internal promotion opportunity. Likewise, Andrew's work with policy and research stakeholders in an adjacent non-profit gave him the confidence to finally pursue the faculty career he had learned to fear for so long. In this respect, Andrew's story illuminated that career changes between campus education and adjacent contexts may be a revolving door rather than a permanent exit (Brown & Trudell, 2019; Hoffman & Studdert, 2021b).

Exercising Agency: Planning and Supporting Change

A final way storytellers experienced career change was through exercising their agency. Storytellers exercised their agency in two critical ways. First, storytellers shaped their experience by planning their transition from student affairs to new careers. Second, storytellers used perspectives and resources from their career change to support the career journeys of other professionals and graduate students in student affairs, further demonstrating their agency and influence. While the prior two findings detailed the role of early lives, career turning points, and social constraints and resources on how former student affairs professionals experienced career change, this finding shows that storytellers also experienced career change based on agency.

The first way storytellers exercised their agency was by strategically planning their career change following the turning point(s) in their student affairs career, discussed earlier in the first finding. A planned career transition led to a more positive experience, confirming prior evidence and public scholarship that having a plan lessens uncertainty and promotes adjustment (Brown & Trudell, 2019; Kuk et al., 2012; Martin, 2021a; Scheibler, 2017; Smith, 2020). Even Ash, who left student affairs abruptly following an unpleasant conversation with her supervisor, engaged in deliberate planning afterward to navigate her transition. For Danilo and Josephine, finding a career outside of student affairs took years, whereas, for Andrew and Veronica, it took a few months to find an adjacent career path.

Being planful allowed storytellers to prepare and restore their energy for the transition following setbacks and turning points in their student affairs careers. For instance, Josephine took years to prepare for her exit from student affairs and enter a human resources career. To prepare for her career change, Josephine initially crafted an experiment, shifting from a residence life role into a human resources role in housing operations. Ibarra (2002) previously found that

crafting career experiments helps career changers "figure out what [they] really want to do" and "try out new professional roles" before "having to leap into new positions too quickly" (p. 45). While this experiment in housing turned out to be a disappointment for Josephine, it still helped her realize she needed additional skills to ensure her transition into a human resources career. In turn, Josephine completed a certificate in human resources to bolster her marketability. Finally, she proactively planned financial costs with her wife to prepare for the setbacks of the career change and waited for a promising job offer to leave student affairs.

Relatedly, Danilo's and Ash's transition plans consisted of time-out periods to recover from the issues of work-life integration and unsupportive supervisors they endured in student affairs, which supports the work of Ibarra (2003) and Williams (2019). Ibarra (2003) found that time-out periods can take diverse forms, from a ten-hour drive to a multi-year moratorium, allowing career changers to break away from prior routines and engage in reflective questions about their future. In Williams' (2019) study of Black women's push-out and opt-out of student affairs, one participant's time-out consisted of an "ancestral type of healing" and "cleansing" involving a "freedom playlist" and a "vacation" before submitting her resignation (p. 166).

Similarly, in this study, Danilo was eager to leave student affairs but did not have a long-term plan. As such, he pursued work in another area of higher education in alumni relations to "build [his] sanity back." This decision gave him time to recover from the strain of student affairs work, "ready" himself for a significant change, and focus on starting a family with his wife. Although Ash abruptly departed from student affairs, she, like Danilo, took time to recover her energy following a toxic role and supervisory relationship in student affairs. Ash used this period to find support, write a fiction novel, and prioritize her well-being through runs and backpacking while undergoing infertility treatments.

Storytellers also exercised their agency by challenging the limited discussion of career change in student affairs through their transition perspectives and resources, which underscores and complicates the public scholarship by former student affairs professionals. Public scholarship indicates that former student affairs professionals share their transition journeys through online and print modalities, like magazines, blogs, and podcasts, to support prospective career changers (Scheibler, 2017; Studdert, 2021; Wellhouser, 2016). However, this study found that in addition to online and print modalities, former student affairs professionals also helped individuals in student affairs learn about and pursue career changes through conferences, internships, and hiring opportunities, particularly from their adjacent careers and workplaces.

Feeling agentic and empowered by their career changes, all storytellers participated in YouTube panels to help prospective career changers in student affairs with the information they lacked in their journeys. Storytellers used this online YouTube space to destigmatize professionals' decision to change careers, discuss the transferable skills individuals can leverage from student affairs, normalize difficult emotions, like fear and shame, offer encouragement, discuss other fulfilling career paths, and offer identity-specific representation, matching the efforts of prior public scholarship (e.g., Brown & Trudell, 2019; Davis, 2022; Elue & Simula, 2023). Josephine, for instance, was mainly driven to share her story to ensure a Black Queer woman's perspective in the discussion on changing careers. Josephine reminded attendees that there are spaces outside of education for them, especially if they feel unhappy in student affairs. Andrew participated in the YouTube panel because he felt a greater sense of freedom after his shift into an adjacent role, and he wanted to share this sense of agency with others, particularly as student affairs professionals faced precarity from COVID-19. He also encouraged listeners that meaningful paths are available beyond campus-based positions.

In addition to sharing their experiences through YouTube panels, Josephine, Veronica, and Ash made additional efforts to support professionals and students in expanding their sense of careers adjacent to and beyond student affairs. While Josephine specifically focused on identity-specific career coaching for Black women and Women of Color, Veronica and Ash introduced internships in their adjacent workplaces to support undergraduate and graduate students interested in learning about additional possibilities beyond campus-based student affairs work. Ash, for example, recruited graduate students for an internship in the high-performance computing (HPC) organization she worked for by advertising that a former student affairs professional would supervise the intern. Graduate student interns and practicum faculty told Ash that they found the internships helpful in expanding students' career prospects. Additionally, as the HPC organization grew familiar with Ash's prior career and master's in student affairs, Ash successfully recruited several former student affairs professionals into her new organization through the Expatriates of Student Affairs Facebook group. Further, both Ash and Veronica tried to present career changes to adjacent careers by submitting proposals to ACPA (College Student Educators International) and NASPA (Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education). This finding underscores the unique role of former student affairs professionals working in adjacent careers in supporting the career development of students and professionals in student affairs beyond sharing their transition experiences, a contribution not fully captured in prior scholarship. Finally, this finding echoes prior scholarship, suggesting that former student affairs professionals often maintain connections to the field, providing mentorship, support, and guidance even after changing careers (Brown & Trudell, 2019; Scheibler, 2017; Williams, 2019).

Study Contributions

The findings of this study make several empirical, theoretical, and methodological contributions. These contributions deepen our understanding of how student affairs professionals experience career change. I detail each of these contributions below.

Expanding the Stories of Student Affairs Career Transitions

This study expands our understanding of the current SA career transition scholarship in at least two ways. First, the findings highlight the critical role of positionality (i.e., identities, early life contexts, and relationships) in how professionals experienced their career change, which the public scholarship on student affairs professionals' career changes has largely ignored. For instance, the findings indicated that motivations for pursuing a career change and the challenges encountered in new workplaces following the transition involve individuals' race, gender, social class, sexual orientation, family background, social networks, and educational resources. The role of positionality in career changes beyond campus-based roles underscores the student affairs-to-faculty transition literature (Guillaume et al., 2020; Perry et al., 2019; West, 2021, 2022), and it deserves greater attention in future research as younger workers, men, and employees of Color are more likely to look for other employment than older workers, women, white employees in SA (Bichsel et al., 2023). Second, the findings expand coverage beyond the student affairs-to-faculty career change to include moves into adjacent or entirely new workplaces. Focusing on career changes beyond campus roles illuminated novel insights, such as challenges encountered, like workplace exclusion, the successive transitions experienced following departure from SA, and the agency of storytellers who aimed to help SA professionals explore careers available to them even after departing the field. In this way, this study begins to address Hernandez's (2018) call for research to explore "what happens after practitioners leave,

what fields, if any, they gravitated towards, or how satisfied they are in their roles" (p. 15–16). Future research should seek to contribute further to these areas, particularly individuals' long-term satisfaction with their career change. Finally, though participants' experiences with career changes beyond campus-based roles did not include constraints in the home and community contexts, unlike the SA-to-faculty career change (e.g., Perry et al., 2019), more research is needed to understand the role personal life factors play in the career change.

Life Course Perspectives

Before this study, there is no existing example of applying life course theory to study student affairs career transitions or student affairs-to-faculty career changes. This study's findings encourage student affairs career research to use life course theory to deliver a "holistic perspective" of career change previously absent in SA career scholarship (Howes & Goodman-Delahunty, 2014, p. 79). Recall that I did not initially adopt the life course theory principles to inform this study. I only selected it after initial inductive analysis to reflect the temporal contexts (i.e., early life and career history) storytellers used to frame their career change experience. In the end, the three principles of life course theory, dynamic lives, linked lives, and agency, helped honor storytellers' early life and career trajectory and the interplay between their decisions and external settings, including the constraints and resources within storyteller's SA workplace, home and community, and new workplaces that shaped their career change.

Though prior student affairs-to-faculty career change literature highlights the role of agency and external settings and actors in career change (Guillaume et al., 2020; Kniess, 2019; Kniess et al., 2019; Lancaster, 2005; Martinez et al., 2020; Wallace & Ford, 2023), this scholarship has overlooked the temporal context of the career change, risking a static, simplified, and incomplete analysis of career change that ignores the interplay of a person's past, present,

and future in the timing and experience of a career transition. In this study, storytellers used early life events and relationships to communicate the subjective aspects of their career change (i.e., lifelong need for safety), aspects that would have been lost if I had conceptualized career change as the period before and/or after work in student affairs (e.g., Kniess et al., 2017; Perry et al., 2019; West, 2021, 2022). As such, future research on SA career changes can further build upon the life course principle of dynamic lives to account for a career change as an unfolding transition within a person's life trajectory rather than a single isolated period.

Finally, this study builds on the broader career change scholarship in two critical ways. First, while research has employed life course theory to study how individuals from different industries transitioned into a shared profession (i.e., Preoteasa, 2021), this study employed life course to consider how individuals in a common profession (i.e., student affairs) experienced career change into adjacent or different career industries (also see Howes & Goodman-Delahunty, 2014). Second, this study used life course perspectives to underscore the differing positionality of storytellers in their career change experience, which prior studies employing a life course framing downplayed or overlooked (Preoteasa, 2021; Howes & Goodman-Delahunty, 2014). By using life course principles to emphasize storytellers' positionality, this study supports broader career development efforts to advance critical analyses that uncover the "dialectical relationship" between individuals and their contexts, as well as recognizing that "different individuals" have "different resources to shape their lives [and careers]" (Thomsen et al., 2022, p. 482). Future research should also apply life course theory to consider individuals' micro contexts (i.e., positionality). Further, scholars should consider the historical and macro contexts surrounding individuals' career change, which was not the focus of this study (Elder et al., 2003). For instance, future research into student affairs career transitions and change might use

life course theory to offer a macro-level analysis of federal, state, and organizational forces shaping careers and career change, such as the recent legislative bans against diversity, equity, and inclusion that have led to higher education organizations eliminating roles held by student affairs professionals forced to face a career change (Bauman, 2021; Hicks, 2024; Krone, 2021).

Stories as Methodology

The methodology of stories in this study allowed storytellers to describe the form of their career change (chronology of the transition and turning point and how it fit into their whole life trajectory) and the content (the themes that arose within and across data points) (Cohen & Mallon, 2001). Stories captured memory's contradictory, emerging, and incomplete role within and between data from different points in storytellers' lives (Marshall, 2000). When I referenced the secondary YouTube data recorded three years earlier in the narrative interviews later, storytellers like Josephine admitted to me, "I don't even remember what I said in summer 2020," and Danilo noted how the interviews "forced" him to "open up some memory passages" that he had not "gone down in a little while." Interestingly, even though much time had passed since their career change, all storytellers offered greater detail than previously included in the YouTube videos. Thus, the stories and subsequent data generation from three years challenged the typical cross-sectional research designs that explore SA career changes and transitions from one moment in time (e.g., Boettcher et al., 2019; Kniess et al., 2017; Underwood & Cawthon, 1999). Further, Marshall (2000) noted that "telling one's story fully, and being heard with respect, can be a part of a process of life development" (p. 2). Indeed, several years after their career transition, storytellers expressed gratitude for having the space to reflect on a period of difficulty and uncertainty. Ash noted that telling her career change story was "really fun," sharing, "Just kind of thinking about how I've grown, what I'm taking with me. …Thank you for

the opportunity to reflect on my career in a specific way. …It's been insightful for me, too." Veronica, too, appreciated the "opportunity to reflect" through the study. These comments from storytellers suggest that future research on student affairs career transitions can benefit from story-based methodologies that detail the objective dimensions of career change (i.e., shifts in career roles, salary, industry, etc.) and invite participants to engage in the subjective aspects (i.e., emotions, meanings, reflection, etc.) of the transition that contributes to their life trajectory.

Recommendations for Future Research

This small-scale study highlights an untapped research area related to career changes beyond campus education that researchers can expand. Here, I recommend three directions for future research based on the findings of this study. First, I will detail opportunities for studying the career change experiences of current and former SA professionals. Then, I will detail the opportunity for future SA research on career changes to consider diverse positionalities. Finally, I will discuss the need for future student affairs research to explore the utility of social media for learning about professional topics and significant transitions, such as career change.

Expanding Career Change Inquiry

There are at least four ways researchers can build upon this study to expand insights on career change. These opportunities focus on the different types and directions of career change and additional theoretical lenses and analyses needed. Below, I detail each of these opportunities.

Narrowing the Content or Context of the Career Change

Storytellers' career change experiences reflected a variety of new work contexts (i.e., small, international, or adjacent non-profit organizations) and/or content (i.e., human resources, K–12, high-performance computing, organizational and policy change, etc.). However, these experiences leave out other career changes former SA professionals have experienced (Eng,

2020). Future research can thus consider the career changes of SA professionals who left campus education to work in for-profit organizations or for self-employment (e.g., Scheibler, 2017; Smith, 2020). Additionally, researchers can narrow the scope of their investigation by specifying the endpoint of the career change, like studies of SA practitioners who pursued careers in faculty or academic affairs (e.g., Patterson, 2019; Underwood & Cawthon, 1999). This might look like studying the career change from SA to human resources or other specific industries.

Revolving Career Changes

The findings suggest that individuals who leave SA remain open to returning to HE. Indeed, Andrew's positive experiences working in an adjacent organization on community college policy and organizational changes helped him revisit a faculty career in a higher education program. Further, Veronica and Danilo remained open to returning to HE. Researchers may consider the experiences of those who seek to or do return to campus positions and how their time away from SA/HE shaped their subsequent transitions and careers. In this respect, scholars could also examine the practices of SA leaders and supervisors who hire professionals with outside experiences to help inform prospective career changers' and former SA professionals' long-term plans (Hoffman & Studdert, 2021b).

Limbo, Lateral, and Downward Career Changes

I selected the storytellers in this study from a YouTube panel of former SA professionals who had successfully navigated the transition and adjusted to their new careers despite constraints in their prior SA and new workplaces. As such, the experiences of career change in this study may not reflect the experiences of those who struggle to initiate or adjust to the change. Future research could cover the experiences of SA professionals who desire a career change but are stuck in limbo and unable to transition (Sullivan & Ariss, 2021).

Finally, Josephine and Ash made short-term sacrifices to support their career change, unlike Andrew, Danilo, and Veronica. While Josephine took a pay cut initially to gain experience in human resources, Ash abruptly left SA and the workforce. In this respect, future research could explore individuals' adjustment to downward or lateral transitions (Sullivan & Ariss, 2021). Some SA professionals may pursue lateral moves or demotions in other sectors to enhance learning and improve future opportunities (Sullivan & Ariss, 2021). Relatedly, researchers should also consider career change experiences that follow involuntary terminations, lay-offs, and campus closure or consolidation in the SA field, as none of the storytellers except Ash in this study experienced such transition factors (e.g., Kuk et al., 2012).

Critical Theories and Structural Analyses

Given the diversity of the SA workforce (Pritchard & McChesney, 2018), this study presented the career change experiences of former SA professionals by centering diverse positionalities in terms of prior life and work histories, multiple social identities (e.g., race, gender, sexual orientation, etc.), and professional backgrounds in SA. Further, this study contextualized and interpreted storytellers' experiences with SA career transition literature framed by critical theories. Still, future research should explicitly employ culturally responsive theories to examine the career change experiences of SA professionals based on systematically marginalized identities and/or culturally relevant knowledge, relationships, and strategies (e.g., Guillaume et al., 2019; Perry et al., 2019; Wallace & Ford, 2023; West, 2021, 2022).

Relatedly, this study's application of life course perspectives was limited to understanding how storytellers experienced their career change from a micro- and meso-level. Such analysis fails to acknowledge structural and institutional inequalities, such as "neoliberal governance, patriarchy, white supremacy, colonial history, and heteronormativity" (Thomsen et

al., 2022, p. 483). Future research may approach the examination of career change from a macro level to understand how larger socio-historical contexts and trends (i.e., higher education labor market fluctuations; impact of anti-diversity, equity, and inclusion legislation) influence participants' experiences with career change (Tomlinson et al., 2018).

Generating More Diverse Stories

This study featured five storytellers with diverse positionalities. These storytellers offered rich insights on the career change experience from varying identities (i.e., Black, white, first-generation, cisgender men and women, gay, queer, heterosexual, married, single, and parent), SA professional levels (i.e., entry-, mid-, and senior-level), and SA functional areas (i.e., student leadership development, residence life, student activities, student union, and Dean of Students). It is necessary to recognize that the positionality of storytellers (i.e., identities, professional levels, and functional areas) does not represent all SA professionals holding similar positionalities. As such, further research with SA professionals from similar and different positionalities should confirm and complicate the insights of this study, and the storytellers' experiences should not be generalized beyond the data discussed here.

Indeed, this study excluded several identities, professional levels, functional areas, and global contexts, which future research should address. The career change experiences of a Chief Student Affairs Officer (e.g., Vice President of Student Affairs), a multicultural student affairs professional, or SA professionals who identify as Latine/o/a, Asian, multi-racial, Trans*, undocumented, or disabled likely extend beyond the findings of this study. Experiencing a career change from an entry-level SA role a person imagined as the start of their SA career trajectory may differ from a senior-level role a person advanced to after 20-plus years in the field (Kuk et al., 2012; Davis, 2022). Finally, all storytellers in this study underwent a career change in the

U.S. context. Since the student affairs and services profession spans other nations in the Global North and South, researchers must consider additional perspectives on career changes beyond the U.S. (Ludeman & Schreiber, 2020).

The Utility of Social Media in Career Development Learning

Employing social media, specifically YouTube videos, as a secondary data source in this study illuminated how storytellers exercised agency in their career changes. The findings of this study indicated that all five storytellers struggled to learn about career changes in adjacent or new industries when they worked in student affairs due to a lack of information from SA professional associations or disapproval from SA colleagues and mentors regarding such a transition. Additionally, the findings of this study indicated that storytellers experienced career change partly based on their participation in YouTube video panels, which reflected their agency as they addressed the lack of resources on career changes in the SA field by disseminating their insights to professionals exploring such change. Indeed, scholars have noted the critical role of social media in career development and adult learning, including the role of popular culture and related media in helping counter elite, dominant narratives (Bridgstock, 2019; Wright, 2018). In this regard, future research should focus on the utility of social media and their role in facilitating professional education about career changes and other professional topics that leaders and national associations in the SA field may otherwise ignore. For instance, though storytellers asserted their agency by participating in YouTube videos aimed at tackling a lack of information on career changes in the SA field and helping current professionals consider similar transitions, how are such social media used and experienced by the intended audience (i.e., current SA professionals) of these videos? Further, what is the impact of social media, such as YouTube videos, created by former SA professionals on current professionals' career decisions? Scholars

may even broaden this inquiry to consider the general role of popular culture in continuing career and professional education in the SA field beyond graduate coursework.

Implications for Practice

It is not the case, however, that the talents of every [person] who leaves the SSAO track must be lost to the student affairs profession, higher education, or societal productivity. There are ways to preserve their experience and talents, even while supporting the exploration of professional options. …The point of mentoring is not to guarantee that every mid-career professional should be an SSAO aspirant; rather, the point is to ensure that professionals are satisfied and productive, even if that means leaving the field for other employment or for unpaid work at home or in the community.

— Dr. Kristen A. Renn

I often revisited Dr. Renn's (2004) words from the introduction chapter of *Roads Taken: Women in Student Affairs at Mid-Career*. In this study, I internalized the limited empirical and professional discourse surrounding career changes within student affairs, finding it difficult to form and share implications. However, Dr. Renn's (2004) writing confirmed my sense of further implicating the student affairs field in supporting professionals with the "exploration of professional options" (p. 174) and that studying career change was a way to support this aim.

The career change stories of the storytellers provide multiple implications for practice in student affairs and prospective career changers. These implications focus on addressing the career transition needs of diverse professionals and providing support for those considering a career change beyond campus education. Thus, I first discuss why the student affairs field should take career change more seriously as an issue of social mobility and sense of calling. I then detail the efforts student affairs professional associations, graduate programs, leaders, supervisors, colleagues, and prospective career changers should adopt.

The Student Affairs Field's Role in Social Mobility and Sense of Calling

Storytellers initially pursued a student affairs career because of its tangible resources (i.e., housing, mentoring, identity-based inclusion, career development, etc.). Storytellers did not enter

college dreaming of a higher education or student affairs career and instead grew aware of the student affairs field and profession through their campus activities and relationships with campus educators, consistent with prior scholarship and accounts of student affairs career choice (Ardoin, 2014; Brown, 1987; Taub & McEwen, 2006; Tull et al., 2009). Ash, Andrew, and Josephine, who reported financial instability and a lack of belonging in early life, chose a student affairs career as it represented social mobility for them.

Sociologists Heath and Li (2024) defined social mobility as "movement between different positions in society's system of social stratification" (p. 1). Social stratification in U.S. society, higher education, and student affairs reflects historical exclusions connected to racism, sexism, heterosexism, and classism, among other isms, that commonly view white, wealthy, property-owning educated, heterosexual men as the top social strata (ACPA, 2022; Bailey, 2011; Boss & Bravo, 2021; Kortegast, 2021; Lee & Karbley, 2021; Olson et al., 2022; Robbins et al., 2019; Wallace & Ford, West, 2021, 2022). While sociologists recognize social mobility involves different movements (i.e., inter- or intra-generational mobility), most focus on movement across broad occupational classes distinguished by their "'life chances', such as their chances for material prosperity, security of employment and income, promotion prospects and wellbeing" (Bukodi and Goldthorpe as cited in Heath & Li, 2024, p. 6). Indeed, Ash, Andrew, and Josephine believed a student affairs career would provide previously unavailable life chances. For instance, Josephine, a Black Queer woman who grew up on food stamps, gained access to free housing and travel, previously out of reach. Even Veronica, who reported low levels of marginalization and economic constraints in childhood, accepted initial downward mobility in a student affairs career, hoping that she would eventually enjoy promotion prospects and long-term wellbeing. Similarly, Danilo accepted downward mobility, taking a pay cut to pursue values-based work.

Though storytellers did not go into the student affairs field drawn to a calling, undergraduate, entry-level, and graduate roles in student affairs areas led most storytellers to later explore and perceive SA as a calling as the field initially fulfilled their core needs and values. In the broader vocational psychology, organizational behavior, and management literature, Ahn et al.'s (2017) study of career changes presented a definition of a sense of calling as fulfillment, serving others, spiritual and intuitive feelings, and a part of self-identity. In student affairs, work promoting student learning and development on college campuses has been described as a calling (Boehman, 2007). For instance, after receiving support from graduate peers for her identity as a Queer Black woman, Josephine committed to the student affairs career to ensure her safety as well as to cultivate inclusion for other Black and Queer students.

However, as noted in prior career change studies (Ahn et al., 2017), storytellers' sense of calling was not static but changed as individuals navigated the world of student affairs work. Indeed, the reality of SA, with its workplace exclusion, ideal worker norms, low salary, and limited upward mobility, conflicted with storytellers' earlier accounts of the field. Veronica, for example, found that social mobility was slow to materialize after nearly ten years in the profession, and this tension grew for her as she worked with white students and supervisors with higher salaries and social mobility than her. She refused to wait any longer to be paid adequately, looking outside the field as many have previously done (Marshall et al., 2016; Silver & Jakeman, 2014). Storytellers' reasons for career change raise the question of whether student affairs can be considered a long-term calling and the competition for upward mobility in the career, given the field's structure: a higher number of low-paying entry-level jobs and few high-paying senior roles and promotions, disproportionately held by white men and women (Pritchard & McChesney, 2018; Surrett, 2021, 2024; West, 2021). The field must be transparent about the

gaps in social mobility and calling, particularly for professionals from underrepresented groups who are increasingly represented in and anticipated to fill entry-level roles (Ardoin, 2023). Though storytellers initially perceived student affairs as a tool for long-term mobility, the benefits of mobility were short-term peaking between their undergraduate and entry-level roles.

The field should address concerns over mobility by challenging ideal worker norms and supporting a more sustainable and equitable student affairs profession (Ardoin, 2021; Sallee, 2021). Of course, with ongoing concerns about the public value and cost of higher education, compounded by reduced enrollments and budget cuts, increasing salaries or fiscal resources to support mobility may be difficult. Thus, the field should prioritize transparency regarding earning potential, salaries, resources, and other financial concerns (e.g., salary versus cost of living; raising a family) for professionals and, at minimum, support professionals in exploring career paths beyond campus-based roles in support of their needs for mobility.

Finally, the field should align its socialization and professional development with professionals' experiences and acknowledge the potential for an unanswered calling. Magolda (as cited in Ardoin, 2014) noted that "A key challenge of navigating adult life is finding one's purpose" (p. xi). Indeed, most storytellers, minus Andrew, embraced student affairs as a long-term calling and found it difficult later on to continue this calling at the expense of their needs, creating uncertainty about their purpose. This uncertainty about their purpose was made complex by the lack of information and support in the field about alternative career paths and changes. Danilo and Ash noted that it is hypocritical for the field to expect student affairs educators to nurture student development while ignoring their evolving developmental needs. Magolda (as cited in Ardoin, 2014), for instance, noted that before student educators can help collegians find their purpose, they must also "reflect on skills and abilities to identify areas for continued

growth; reflect on and establish internal beliefs, identities, and social relations; and take responsibility for continued professional growth" (p. xiii). Yet, when storytellers tried to take responsibility for their continued professional development, they encountered resistance from leaders and colleagues within the field (e.g., Danilo). In this respect, Boehman (2007) has previously recommended that the field do a better job of fostering affective commitment to the field among professionals. Yet, storytellers' experiences highlighted that commitment to student affairs as a calling is not static and may fluctuate between being perceived and lived. Ahn et al. (2017) noted that while perceiving a calling "refers to the degree of which an individual feels called to a certain career, living a calling refers to the degree to which an individual is actually engaging in work that aligns with [their] calling (Duffy & Autin, 2013)" (p. 49). For instance, though Ash perceived student affairs as her calling in graduate school as she was able to enact her value of diversity and identity as a learner, her actual full-time roles in the field limited her ability to experience a lived calling as she was unable to engage in learning or diversity-related work. The field needs to recognize the pain that comes from an unanswered calling rather than using calling as a moralistic or virtuous ideal to justify and normalize the field's socialization of professionals into a "workaholic culture by creating expectations that long hours, low pay, and other sacrifices are the norm" (Boehman, 2007, p. 321).

Professional Associations

The findings highlight that professional associations, like NASPA and ACPA, can play a more active role in supporting the career development of their members. All storytellers indicated that a lack of information on career changes within the student affairs profession constrained their ability to undergo the transition. Moreover, NASPA rejected Veronica's and Ash's efforts to present information on adjacent career changes. NASPA program reviewers told

Ash that the topic of the presentation proposal did not fit the association's aims. However, storytellers argued that NASPA's unwillingness to discuss career changes contradicts its commitment to its members' career development. While Veronica succeeded in promoting adjacent careers through an ACPA presentation and an internship opportunity for students in NASPA's undergraduate mentoring program, the findings suggest that former student affairs professionals generated these opportunities to introduce career changes. Instead of waiting for former student affairs professionals to come forward, associations should gather insights and foster dialogue about career changes beyond campus roles.

NASPA and ACPA should embrace career change discussions and help its members identify how time in the field prepares professionals for success in other career paths. One way to do this is to help professionals identify how the professional competencies they developed from student affairs practice translate to other industries. Another way associations can support their members is by inviting and promoting multiple perspectives about the career change experience. Associations should ask individuals who have contributed their reflections on practice through public scholarship, such as the *Student Affairs Now* podcast, to share their experiences. These discussions can also serve as opportunities to highlight work concerns involving salary, workplace exclusion, privileged students, work-life integration, and supervisors that drive professionals' decisions to change careers, as was the case with the storytellers in this study. In this way, associations can tackle staff morale, exclusion, and retention issues in the field while offering professionals an additional pathway forward. These discussions may help individuals discern whether a career change will meet their needs and values. Josephine noted the potential benefits of support, stating, "If we do our job well, we are creating ambassadors for

our [profession]. So those people are going to want to come back and volunteer for us, or they're going to refer people because they had a good experience working here."

To this end, most of the storytellers who pursued adjacent careers in this study remained open to returning to student affairs and higher education under the right conditions. This openness suggests an opportunity for NASPA and ACPA to explore revolving career trends. Hiring managers, supervisors, leaders, and researchers may be interested in tapping into a pool of individuals who are knowledgeable about higher education and have also gained new skills from outside of the field (Hoffman & Studdert, 2021b). Finally, storytellers pursuing adjacent careers still support the student affairs profession, as exemplified by Ash's and Veronica's efforts to provide internship opportunities to students interested in student affairs and adjacent careers. Associations should pursue collaborations with adjacent sectors, mainly since these areas still support the mission of higher education through third-party roles.

Graduate Programs

Graduate programs in student affairs and higher education can set their students apart in a profession characterized by career transitions by discussing career changes beyond campus-based positions. For Ash and Danilo, it helped when their graduate programs emphasized the transferability of their student affairs and higher education to adjacent industries or other fields. As such, graduate programs should be willing to discuss the transferability of student affairs skills and competencies into new or adjacent sectors. These conversations should unfold during the admissions process as storytellers indicated they were figuring out how to best meet their career needs and values before their graduate education. Graduate programs should help prospective students identify the core needs and values driving their career decisions.

Further, graduate programs should invite former student affairs professionals into the classroom to provide differing perspectives on career development and transitions (Carpenter et al., 1987; Hancock, 1988). If this is not easily feasible, graduate faculty could also include public scholarship authored by former student affairs professionals about their career changes in their curriculum (e.g., Brown & Trudell, 2019; Scheibler, 2017). Based on Ash's experience, it may be valuable for graduate programs with practicum requirements to list adjacent organizations with which graduate students can partner to fulfill their requirements. Graduate faculty should incorporate these various educational opportunities to highlight the salutary effects a student affairs education can have for individuals' long-term career trajectory, even if individuals are pushed out or opt out of the field. Josephine, Danilo, Veronica, and Ash expressed gratitude for their student affairs education, and they attributed their ability to adjust to the transition to the skills, knowledge, and relationships they formed during their time in the field.

Leaders, Supervisors, and Colleagues

As discussed in the findings, leaders, supervisors, and colleagues play a vital role in shaping how professionals experience their career change from student affairs through the various constraints and resources they pose. Regarding constraints, leaders, supervisors, mentors, and colleagues should refrain from disapproving of their colleagues' decisions to change careers. Even if leaders, supervisors, mentors, and colleagues would not choose a career change for themselves, they should acknowledge that such a transition comes after careful consideration, and their disapproval challenges the transition process. Here, Surrett's (2024) advice is worth revisiting, "student affairs professionals" "would do well to avoid stigmatizing departure from the field. In doing so, we may limit the boomerang of good professionals back into the field if leaving in the first place was deemed a failure" (para 38).

This study found that storytellers benefited from student affairs supervisors, mentors, and colleagues who offered resources, such as information, job leads, networking connections, encouragement, and social support for processing the transition. As professionals consider career changes, supervisors, mentors, and leaders in student affairs organizations can work to simultaneously retain individuals while helping them strategically work towards their new careers, as exemplified by Josephine's supervisor. Josephine also noted how a presentation by a former student affairs professional in her residence life department inspired her career change. In this way, student affairs leaders and supervisors can share the findings of this study or invite former student affairs professionals to speak with their teams to nurture a supportive environment where dialogue about evolving career needs and values is encouraged.

Prospective Career Changers

The findings offer various insights for student affairs professionals considering a career change. This study and other stories from former student affairs professionals can help prospective career changers discern if such a transition is the right path for them. Given that "how to" advice is well-documented in public scholarship, I focus on new findings involving career needs and values and new workplace constraints that can be instructive for career changers. While some have noted that individual values and needs can outgrow the student affairs career, sparking change (Brown & Trudell, 2019), the findings of this study suggested that storytellers' early life needs and values continued to inform their career decision-making. In this respect, prospective career changers in student affairs may benefit from reflecting on their core needs and values related to their early lives, social contexts, relationships, and identities that drove their decision to enter student affairs careers and whether those factors continue to drive

their decision and goals for their career change. One practical way to do this is by writing one's life story to reflect early life themes that shape career decision-making (Savickas, 2013).

Second, the findings suggested that storytellers continued to experience exclusion, such as racism, racial isolation, microaggressions, and gender pay inequities, in their new careers and that identity-related exclusion was not limited to the student affairs profession. For professionals who hold systematically marginalized identities and pursue their career change partly to secure inclusive work environments and colleagues, it will be important to research organizations and industries that reflect their career values and needs as a part of their transition plans. For those who find themselves in Josephine's situation as the only Black Queer woman in an organization, individuals should be ready to advocate for themselves with their new supervisors and employers for culturally relevant professional resources and networks.

Limitations

Future research should study the career change experiences of SA professionals in real-time using a longitudinal approach to better link the causes of career change with actual behaviors (Howes & Goodman-Delahunty, 2011; Wise & Millward, 2005). Although this study included longitudinal data (i.e., field texts from YouTube panels and interviews separated by three years), the generated field texts featured retrospective data about a career change experience that had come to pass instead of accounts of those undergoing the career change process in real time. Concerns about the quality and reliability of retrospective data, such as recall bias and circular causality, have been raised. Recall bias is an issue as individuals struggle to remember motivations, feelings, and timing related to past changes (Fehring & Bessant, 2009). Another concern is circular causality, as people's present conditions, feelings, and beliefs shape their current interpretations of past experiences. At the same time, people's past

experiences also shape their present, making it difficult to detangle the interplay between a person's past, present, and future (Fehring & Bessant, 2009).

Conclusion

This study sought to explore the career change experiences of former student affairs professionals who left campus-based positions for adjacent and new careers, which remain grossly understudied. This study employed a social constructivist epistemology and story methodology, recognizing that individuals use stories to construct meaning and communicate knowledge about their career experiences. This epistemological stance and methodological approach helped me situate participants as storytellers and elicit their experiences through their career change stories. This study employed restorying analysis and life course perspectives to examine storytellers' stories. Life course perspectives allowed me to conceptualize career change as a dynamic process shaped by a person's early life and career trajectory and the interplay between an individual's decisions and external settings.

The findings revealed that the five storytellers experienced career change in three ways. First, storytellers experienced career change through the interplay of career needs and values shaped in their early life and turning points in their student affairs careers. Storytellers highlighted that, initially, their needs and values of stability, consistency, support, well-being, agency, and inclusion from early life shaped their decision to enter student affairs. However, over time, storytellers' ongoing concerns with salary, workplace exclusion, privileged students, work-life integration, and supervisors in the student affairs profession grew to conflict with their career needs and values. In the end, key turning points illuminated the mismatch between storytellers' career needs and values and their careers as student affairs professionals, driving their decision to depart student affairs and change careers.

Second, storytellers experienced career change based on social contexts, including their linked lives with colleagues, supervisors, mentors, family, and friends in these contexts. All storytellers highlighted how the student affairs profession, family and community, new workplaces, and the actors within these settings shaped their career change experience through various constraints and resources. The constraints storytellers experienced included a lack of information, disapproval from colleagues and mentors, skepticism, and exclusion. Simultaneously, storytellers benefited from several resources, including supportive colleagues, transferable skills and knowledge, financial assistance, informational support, networking, work-life integration, social support, and professional growth opportunities.

Finally, storytellers experienced career change by exercising their agency in two ways. First, storytellers planned their transition following turning point(s) in their student affairs career, which led to a positive experience as they took time to prepare and restore their energy for the transition. Second, storytellers illustrated their agency and influence by challenging the limited discussion of career changes in student affairs through their efforts to support students and professionals with learning about career changes even after leaving the field.

The findings advance not only our understanding of work conditions professionals experience in student affairs but also the career needs and values and career turning points driving individuals' decision to change careers, the social contexts and actors that shape their transition through constraints and resources, and forms of individual agency used to navigate the transition. Moreover, the shared and unique stories of Josephine, Andrew, Danilo, Veronica, and Ash suggest that the student affairs profession, including its associations, leaders, supervisors, and faculty, can and should do more to serve the career development needs of prospective career changers. A straightforward way the field can support prospective career changers in student

affairs is by acknowledging and generating knowledge about this type of career change through empirical research and professional development opportunities. To this end, I hope this study helps prospective career changers and students in student affairs from diverse positionalities feel more informed and equipped to navigate new career opportunities a student affairs career can open for them in adjacent or new industries.

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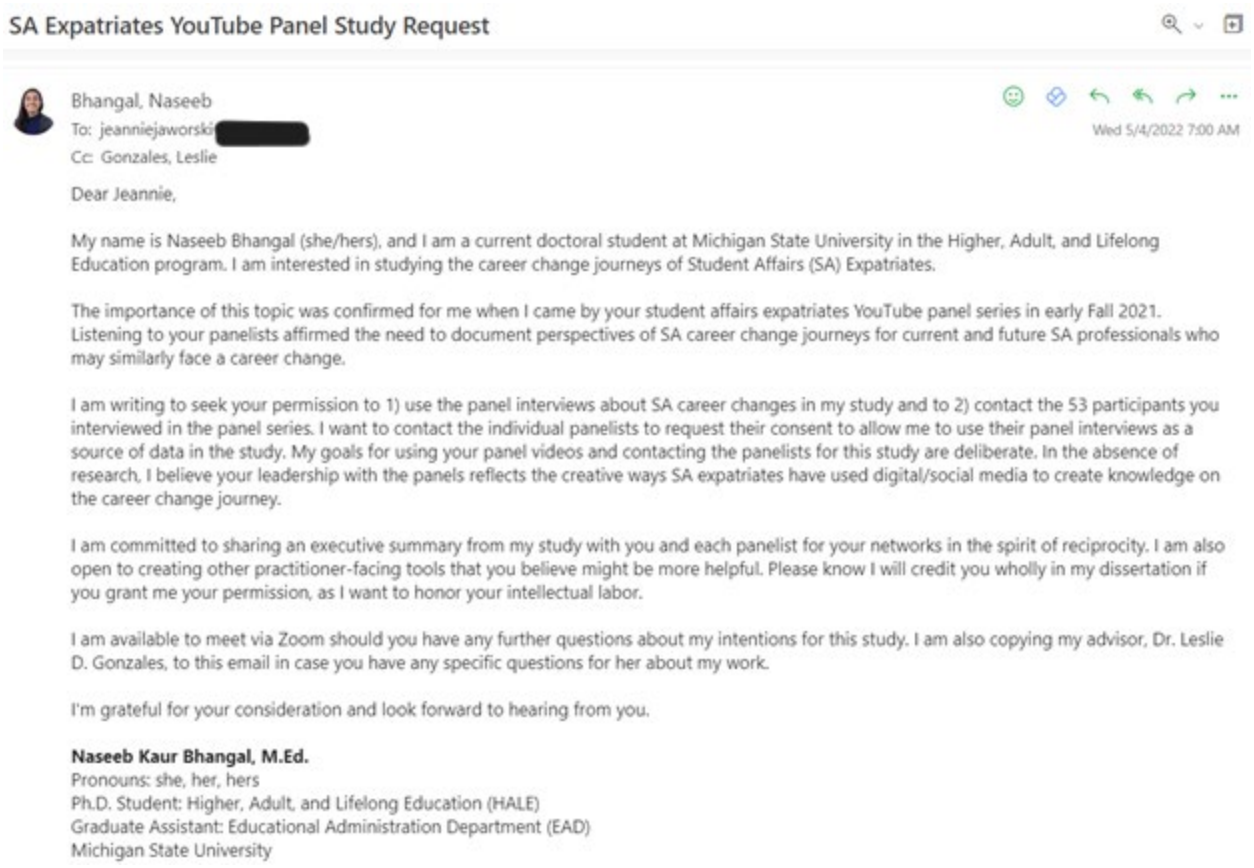
APPENDIX A

EMAIL CORRESPONDENCE WITH JEANNIE JAWORSKI ABOUT THE YOUTUBE PANEL INTERVIEWS

Figure 1

Initial Email to Jeannie Jaworski



SA Expatriates YouTube Panel Study Request

Bhangal, Naseeb
To: jeanniejaworski[redacted]
Cc: Gonzales, Leslie

Wed 5/4/2022 7:00 AM

Dear Jeannie,

My name is Naseeb Bhangal (she/hers), and I am a current doctoral student at Michigan State University in the Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Education program. I am interested in studying the career change journeys of Student Affairs (SA) Expatriates.

The importance of this topic was confirmed for me when I came by your student affairs expatriates YouTube panel series in early Fall 2021. Listening to your panelists affirmed the need to document perspectives of SA career change journeys for current and future SA professionals who may similarly face a career change.

I am writing to seek your permission to 1) use the panel interviews about SA career changes in my study and to 2) contact the 53 participants you interviewed in the panel series. I want to contact the individual panelists to request their consent to allow me to use their panel interviews as a source of data in the study. My goals for using your panel videos and contacting the panelists for this study are deliberate. In the absence of research, I believe your leadership with the panels reflects the creative ways SA expatriates have used digital/social media to create knowledge on the career change journey.

I am committed to sharing an executive summary from my study with you and each panelist for your networks in the spirit of reciprocity. I am also open to creating other practitioner-facing tools that you believe might be more helpful. Please know I will credit you wholly in my dissertation if you grant me your permission, as I want to honor your intellectual labor.

I am available to meet via Zoom should you have any further questions about my intentions for this study. I am also copying my advisor, Dr. Leslie D. Gonzales, to this email in case you have any specific questions for her about my work.

I'm grateful for your consideration and look forward to hearing from you.

Naseeb Kaur Bhangal, M.Ed.
Pronouns: she, her, hers
Ph.D. Student: Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Education (HALE)
Graduate Assistant: Educational Administration Department (EAD)
Michigan State University

Figure 2

Jeannie Jaworski's Email Reply and Permission

SA Expatriates YouTube Panel Study Request

J jeanniejaworski[redacted]

To: Bhangal, Naseeb

Cc: Gonzales, Leslie

Thu 5/19/2022 9:36 PM

Naseeb,

I appreciate the extra outreach to bring this email to my attention and apologize for my delay.

Your research sounds interesting - I'm still very involved in helping Student Affairs and other Higher Ed professionals in their career transitions. The panels are currently publicly posted so I have no concerns with you utilizing them for your research. That said, it's not really my place to give (or withhold!) permission for you to contact the other panelists. I can see how my support would be helpful for the sake of your outreach - you're welcome to share that you've contacted me and I've given support for the use of these publicly posted resources for your project.

I actually have been thinking a lot recently about whether or not keeping these panels public is the best idea now nearly two full years later. There is a chance that your outreach could remind panelists who are less plugged into the SA Expat group that the videos exist and they may wish for them to be removed or not publicly listed. We'll see what happens!

Jeannie Jaworski

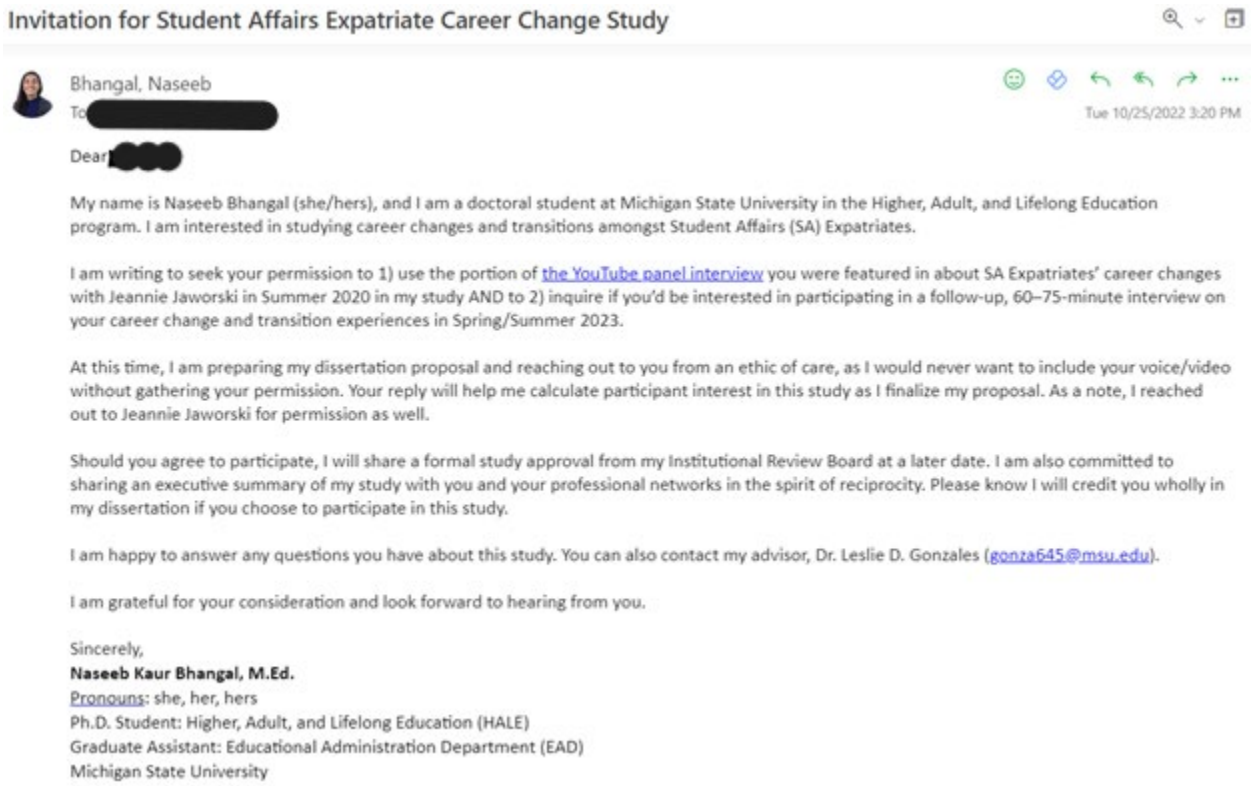
[redacted]

APPENDIX B

INITIAL EMAIL CORRESPONDENCE WITH PANELISTS FOR GENERAL STUDY INTEREST

Figure 3

Email to YouTube Panelists



Invitation for Student Affairs Expatriate Career Change Study

Bhangal, Naseeb
To [redacted]
Tue 10/25/2022 3:20 PM

Dear [redacted]

My name is Naseeb Bhangal (she/hers), and I am a doctoral student at Michigan State University in the Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Education program. I am interested in studying career changes and transitions amongst Student Affairs (SA) Expatriates.

I am writing to seek your permission to 1) use the portion of the YouTube panel interview you were featured in about SA Expatriates' career changes with Jeannie Jaworski in Summer 2020 in my study AND to 2) inquire if you'd be interested in participating in a follow-up, 60–75-minute interview on your career change and transition experiences in Spring/Summer 2023.

At this time, I am preparing my dissertation proposal and reaching out to you from an ethic of care, as I would never want to include your voice/video without gathering your permission. Your reply will help me calculate participant interest in this study as I finalize my proposal. As a note, I reached out to Jeannie Jaworski for permission as well.

Should you agree to participate, I will share a formal study approval from my Institutional Review Board at a later date. I am also committed to sharing an executive summary of my study with you and your professional networks in the spirit of reciprocity. Please know I will credit you wholly in my dissertation if you choose to participate in this study.

I am happy to answer any questions you have about this study. You can also contact my advisor, Dr. Leslie D. Gonzales (gonza645@msu.edu).

I am grateful for your consideration and look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,
Naseeb Kaur Bhangal, M.Ed.
Pronouns: she, her, hers
Ph.D. Student: Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Education (HALE)
Graduate Assistant: Educational Administration Department (EAD)
Michigan State University

APPENDIX C

FORMAL STUDY INVITATION TO SELECTED PANELISTS

Dear [Name of Selected Participant],

Thank you for sharing your support for the Student Affairs (SA) Expatriates' career change study I contacted you about in the Fall of 2022. In case it is a helpful refresher, my name is Naseeb, and I am a doctoral student in the Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Education (HALE) program at Michigan State University. For my dissertation research, I am studying the career change experiences of SA expatriates who left the SA field for a new career.

You are being asked to participate in a dissertation study which will: (1) generate a text-based transcript of your past YouTube panel interview from 2020 with Jeannie Jaworski [embed participant video link] about your career change, (2) complete a 5–10-minute demographic survey, (3) share your career change story in two 75–90-minute narrative interviews online via Zoom between May–June 2023, and (4) verify my write-up of your story for details and accuracy (30–60 minutes in Fall 2023). You will receive a $50 e-gift card after completing the survey and two interviews and an additional $20 e-gift card for verifying my write-up of your story.

If you would still like to participate in this study, please thoroughly read the attached Research Participant Information and Consent form and email me to confirm your participation by [deadline]. In your email, please also let me know 3 day(s) and time(s) that work for you in early May, and I will confirm the first interview once I hear from you. I am scheduling interviews Monday through Sunday between 10 am and 6 pm CDT (central daylight time) (and evenings too, if needed). Please note that your consent and participation are entirely voluntary. If you prefer not to participate in this study, you can also indicate this by email.

Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns about this study. You can contact me at bhangaln@msu.edu or (360) 597–6637. You may also contact my advisor and committee chair, Dr. Leslie D. Gonzales (gonza645@msu.edu). And thank you again for taking time to consider supporting this research. Your participation will help better understand former SA professionals' career change experiences.

Sincerely,
Naseeb K. Bhangal, M.Ed., she, her, hers

APPENDIX D

RESEARCH PARTICIPANT INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

Study Title: Student Affairs Expatriates' Career Change Experience
Institutional Review Board Study Approval Number: STUDY00009002
Principle Investigator: Dr. Leslie D. Gonzales, Associate Professor in Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Education, College of Education, Michigan State University, 620 Farm Lane, Room 426, East Lansing, MI 48824, (517) 353–3387, gonza645@msu.edu.

Summary
Researchers are required to provide a consent form to inform you about the research study, to convey that participation is voluntary, to explain the risks and benefits of participation, to explain why you might or might not want to participate, and to empower you to make an informed decision. You should feel free to discuss and ask the researcher any questions you may have.

You are being asked to participate in a dissertation study which will: (1) generate a text-based transcript of your YouTube panel interview from 2020 about your career change from student affairs, (2) ask you to complete a 5–10-minute demographic survey with 15 questions, (3) ask you to tell your career change story in two 75–90-minute Zoom interviews, and (4) ask you to verify the researcher's write-up of your story for details and accuracy (30–60 minutes). You are invited to participate because you expressed interest when the researcher contacted you about the study in Fall 2022.

There are no foreseeable risks associated with this study. Yet, you may experience some emotional discomfort when recounting critical events of your career change from student affairs. Your participation in this study may contribute to advancing research on career transitions in the student affairs profession and aid student affairs professionals considering a career change.

Purpose of Research
From this study, the researcher hopes to learn how student affairs expatriates experienced their career change from the student affairs field by generating career change stories with participants that privilege their interpretations of their objective (e.g., duration of job search; employment type; skills) and subjective circumstances (e.g., work identity, emotions, needs, and ambitions).

What You Will Be Asked to Do
You will be asked to provide the researcher consent to generate a *text-based transcript* of your 2020 YouTube panel interview. The transcript data will be used to understand how you described your career change in the past relative to today and to prepare for our interviews. You will complete a *demographic survey* about your career history and salient social identities. This data will be used to highlight personal factors critical to your career change story. You will participate in *two narrative interviews* (75–90 minutes each). In the first interview, you will be asked to share your career change story from student affairs to your current career. In the second interview, you will be asked to elaborate on and clarify the key themes, events, and individuals that emerged in your career change story during the first interview. The researcher will take an

unstructured, conversational approach to center your interpretations, emotions, and themes of your career change experience.

After studying your various data, you will be asked to *verify* the researcher's written portrayal of your career change story for any information that you would like to further mask to protect your identity and for additional details that may help with retelling and interpreting your story.

Your Rights to Participate, Say No, or Withdraw
Participation is voluntary. Refusal to participate or discontinue participation at any time will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled. You have the right to say no. You may refuse to answer specific questions and change your mind at any time and withdraw.

Data Security
Only the researcher will have access to your data, including a text-based transcript of your YouTube interview, your demographic survey responses, and the audio and transcript files from the narrative interviews. The researcher will be responsible for transcribing the narrative interviews and YouTube interview. This data will be stored on a password-protected computer, which only the researcher can access. Any other access to the material will be with your permission only. This study will inform research on SA expatriates career change, and may result in reports and research papers/presentations which will not include any identifying information but could include anything shared in the YouTube panel, survey, and narrative interviews.

Costs and Benefits of Participating
No costs are associated with your participation in this study outside of the time required to participate. There are a few benefits. First, you will receive a $70 compensation for participating in this study. You will receive a $50 e-gift card after you have completed the survey and narrative interviews. You will receive another $20 e-gift card after verifying your story. The researcher will also send you an executive summary from this study. Finally, this study offers an opportunity for career reflection that may be of personal and professional benefit to you.

Contact Information
If you have concerns or questions about this study, such as scientific issues, how to do any part of it, or to report an injury, please contact either Naseeb K. Bhangal: bhangaln@msu.edu or phone 360–597–6637 OR Dr. Leslie D. Gonzales: gonza645@msu.edu or phone 517–353–3387.

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 at 517 – 355 – 2180, Fax 517 – 432 – 4503, or e-mail irb@msu.edu or regular mail at 4000 Collins Rd., Suite 136, Lansing, MI 48910.

Documentation of Informed Consent
You indicate your voluntary agreement to participate in this study, including your permission to grant access to your YouTube panel interview, by answering the questions in the demographic survey and narrative interviews. You will receive a copy of this form for your records.

APPENDIX E

DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

Directions

This demographic survey is a part of Naseeb K. Bhangal's doctoral study on student affairs expatriates' career change experiences. You have been invited to complete this survey but may opt out at any time.

This survey asks you to complete a demographic survey (with 15 questions) which will take between 5–10 minutes to complete. The survey asks you to provide background information about your career and educational history and salient social identities.

Contact Information

If you have any concerns or questions about this survey, such as scientific issues, how to do any part of it, or to report an injury, please contact the researcher: Naseeb K. Bhangal, Michigan State University, College of Education, 620 Farm Lane, East Lansing, MI 48824, (360) 597–6637, bhangaln@msu.edu.

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 at 517–355–2180, Fax 517–432–4503, or e-mail irb@msu.edu or regular mail at 4000 Collins Rd, Suite 136, Lansing, MI 48910.

Demographic Survey Questions:

1. First Name and Last Name – Free Response, Required

2. Please share a pseudonym to be used to identify you in this study instead of your name. – Free Response, Required

3. Highest Educational Degree Completed, Optional
    a. Associate
    b. Bachelor's
    c. Certificate
    d. Doctorate
    e. Master's
    f. Other: – Free Response

4. Did you obtain graduate training in a student affairs, higher education, student personnel, student counselling, or related program? Optional
    a. Yes
    b. No
    c. Other: [Free Response]

5. [*For those who answered yes to #4*]: In graduate school, were you planning to use your training to prepare for another profession outside of student affairs? Optional
    a. Yes
    b. No
    c. Other: [Free Response]

6. Years in the SA Profession, Optional
    a. 01–03 years
    b. 04–05 years
    c. 06–08 years
    d. 09–10 years
    e. 11–13 years
    f. 14–15 years
    g. 16–18 years
    h. 19–20 years
    i. 21–23 years
    j. 24–25 years
    k. Less than 1 year
    l. Over 25 years

7. What was your professional level in the SA field before your career change? Optional
    a. College/University President or CEO
    b. Entry Level
    c. Graduate Student
    d. Mid Level
    e. Senior Level
    f. Senior Level Academic Affairs Officer
    g. Senior Student Affairs Officer (SSAO) – Executive
    h. Senior Student Affairs Officer (SSAO) – Upper Level
    i. Other – Free Response

8. Preferred Gender Pronouns – Free Response, optional, including "Prefer not to answer" option

9. How do you describe your gender identity – Free Response, optional, including "Prefer not to answer" option

10. How do you describe your racial identity? – Free response, optional, including "Prefer not to answer" option

11. How do you describe your ethnic identity? –Free response, optional, including "Prefer not to answer" option

12. How do you describe your sexual identity? –Free response, optional, including “Prefer not to answer” option

13. Do you identify as a military veteran or service member?
    a. Yes
    b. No
    c. Prefer not to answer

14. Please share any other salient identities for you in terms of your career. –Free response, optional, including “Prefer not to answer” option

15. Birth year –Free response, optional, including “Prefer not to answer” option

APPENDIX F

NARRATIVE INTERVIEW #1 GUIDE

Hi, my name is Naseeb (she/hers). Thank you, {name}, for agreeing to participate in this study. I am grateful for the time you are providing and for your patience with all my communication thus far. As I shared with you in the invitation, I am studying SA expatriates' experiences with a career change from the Student Affairs field for my dissertation study.

Since I will be asking you to disclose much of your career and life story today, I want to share a bit about myself in the spirit of reciprocity. Prior to pursuing my doctoral education, I worked in student affairs. Like many others, I pursued the field due to my positive relationships with undergraduate mentors, most of whom are women, LGBTQIA+-identified, and Women of Color. As a graduate student working in residence life and later as an entry-level professional in student affairs, specifically in multicultural and intercultural affairs, I observed professional attrition from the SA field. Seeing my mentors and colleagues leave the field has made me question my future in the SA field and the dominant career messages taught in student affairs (e.g., lifelong employment). I have become intrigued by how individuals experience, manage, and make meaning of such a significant career transition, not only the objective components (like a job search) but also the subjective parts (emotions and grieving and forming a new professional identity). I am thrilled to have the opportunity to explore this topic over two interviews with you.

Participant Rights and Consent Form

Before we begin today, I want to review some information related to your rights as a participant in this study, such as confidentiality, consent, risks, and benefits. To do this, I would like to review the consent form I emailed you for the study. {Share.} Do I have your permission to turn on the recorder and begin recording? {Await reply.} Now that the recorder is on, I need to gather your verbal consent to begin recording. {Wait for verbal consent}. Thank you!

1. First, please know that everything you share is confidential (handling the participant's private, identifiable information). No one other than me will have access to your data from this study, including the text-based transcript of your YouTube interview with Jeannie Jaworski, your demographic survey responses, and the audio and transcript files from the narrative interviews (today and later). I will be responsible for transcribing the narrative interviews and the one you provided Jeannie Jaworski in the summer of 2020. I will store this data on my password protected computer, which only I will have access to. Any other access to the material will be with your permission only.
2. Second, when we talk today, I will avoid saying your specific position title, employer, and name and instead refer to only your broader career industry, functional areas, and organization type. When I name the file, I will save it with the pseudonym you identified in the demographic survey. I will also mask any additional identifying details or details you ask me to mask. Feel free to let me know during the interviews if you would like me to mask a particular detail/example when something comes up.
3. Third, your participation in this study is completely free and voluntary. You also have the right to observe your privacy by being selective with your responses. I only want you to share as much or as little as you feel comfortable disclosing about your career change.

You may refuse to respond to any follow-up questions and discontinue participation in the study at any time.

4. Fourth, from start to finish, our interview today will last between 75 to 90 minutes. We will meet again for the final interview for a similar length of time.
5. Fifth, after both narrative interviews, I plan to send you a write-up of your career change narrative, combining your YouTube panel account, demographic responses, and the narrative interviews with me. I hope this will allow you to identify any information that needs to be further masked or elaborated to retell your story publicly and accurately.
6. Sixth, there are no foreseeable risks associated with participation in this study. Although, you may experience some emotional discomfort when recounting difficult moments of your career change.
7. Seventh, there are a few benefits to you for participating in this study. You will receive $70 compensation for completing the study. I will email you a $50 e-gift card after you have completed the narrative interviews and another $20 e-gift card after you have verified your drafted story. Additionally, I will provide you an executive summary of this study, and I hope the narrative interviews can be a space for reflection.
8. Finally, your interviews, completed survey responses, and YouTube panel data are for research only. Your data will inform my dissertation, including any research manuscripts, writing, and presentations that come from this dissertation study. None of the data you provide for this study can be used or published without your consent. Having said this, do you have any questions about the consent form I asked you to review before today's interview? Are you still willing to provide consent for this study? {Await reply.} Thank you for your consent.
9. Do you have any other questions about my plans for using your data from today's interview? {Await reply.} Great! Please remember that if you have any questions arise or concerns after today's interview, you can follow-up with me or my dissertation chair, who is also listed in the consent form I provided. Now let's transition!

Study Purpose

My main goal for these narrative interviews is to understand how you experienced your career change from student affair. To do this, I invite you to think about your career change as a story that we will work to identify, tell, and explore together in our conversation today and again in our final interview. Stories are often used in career counseling to help clients understand past vocational experiences and construct future career plans. Further, stories can be helpful as they are familiar everyday communication tools that we use to explain to ourselves and our family, friends, colleagues, and/or employers who we have been, who we are, and who we want to be. Finally, a story can be revised and updated to reflect the changes to a person's life and how they want to describe an experience, which may change with time.

Today, you can begin and end your story however you'd like. There is no right or wrong way of sharing your career change story. I am not looking for what was right or incorrect about your transition experience from student affairs or to confirm a prior answer about career changes. As this is your story, it's most important to me that you identify the people, places, emotions, and themes (triggers of your career change) that are significant for you. Instead of a typical interview with a list of questions we need to cover, I hope this can be a conversation/dialogue between us. As you begin to construct and retell your story, I may use follow-up questions and prompts to help elicit specific details and guide our conversation. You are also more than welcome to ask me questions throughout this conversation if that would be helpful to you for

building trust and rapport with me. I want to pause here to see if you have any questions about my intended goals for today's narrative interview. {Wait for a response.} Now let's begin!

Narrative Interview #1 Prompt(s):
When you discuss your career change from student affairs with friends, family, and colleagues, where does your story begin? How would you like to start your story today?

Can you describe the critical events that took place for you between working in SA, leaving the field, and starting your new job? How did your career change unfold?

Potential Topics:

- Career and Life Histories (e.g., employment history, major life incidents/milestones, etc.)
- Student Affairs Career History (e.g., why you chose this profession; why you left)
- Current Job & Search (e.g., translating SA skills into new industry; interview process)
- Emotions & Embodiment (e.g., reactions to entering student affairs; reactions to leaving it; how your experienced SA work physically in your body versus new work)
- Working Identity (e.g., SA professional/expatriate identity; new professional identity)
- Career Support and (Sociocultural) Contexts (e.g., early messages about careers from family, colleagues, and society; resources you utilized)
- Career Narrative & Meanings (e.g., how does this career change fit into your larger career/life story? Did the reasons for your career change shift over time?)
- Any other critical topics related to your career change you'd like to explore?

Potential Conversation Guides and Follow-Up Questions:
<u>CAREER & LIFE HISTORY, STUDENT AFFAIRS CAREER, AND CURRENT JOB</u>

- Please briefly discuss your career and life history (e.g., the different industries, job types, work responsibilities and/or any major life events that shaped your career).
- Which critical life events/people led you to work in student affairs (SA)? What were your initial goals for your SA career?
- Please describe the student affairs job and organizational situation you left. Can you describe your process of leaving SA for a new career (e.g., what steps, resources, and actors were involved; how did you secure a job outside of SA)? Is this departure recent?
- Are you still in the career field/job that you discussed during the panel with Jeannie in Summer of 2020? If not, where are you now? Where do you see yourself next?

<u>EMOTIONS + EMBODIMENT</u>

- What was your emotional response to leaving SA? How did this response compare to your feelings about entering the SA field? Do any of these emotions still linger in your body?
- Which emotions were prevalent for you during your job search outside of SA?
- What emotions do you experience most consistently in your current career, and how do they compare to your emotional experience in SA? What do you miss the most from your SA career, if anything?

<u>SOCIOCULTURAL CONTEXTS</u>

- What were some of the early messages you received about careers from individuals (e.g., family, friends, mentors, and colleagues) in your life? Did these messages normalize a career change? How did these messages shape your career change from SA, if at all?
- What messages did you encounter in SA about what a career should be? What, if any, messages did you encounter when you began to discuss leaving the SA field for a new career with colleagues? Were these career messages present in your new career context?
- After going through a career change, what messages do you share about the nature of work today (e.g., for those entering SA graduate programs; the workforce)? What does it take to navigate a career today?

CAREER SUPPORT (PEOPLE, CAREER SERVICES OR RESOURCES, ETC.)

- What people (e.g., family, colleagues, head-hunters, career counselors, etc.) played a supportive role during your career change, and how?
- Did you utilize any career services or resources during your job search? How did you locate and utilize these resources/services?
- Do you believe your career change story differs from how people in your life (e.g., children/family) would tell it? In what ways? How did your career change impact others?
- After your career change, you sought to support other SA professionals seeking a career change. Would you agree? Why did you participate in the online YouTube panels with Jeannie in the summer of 2020? And now, this study? Would you say social media or digital career platforms offer support to career changers in the SA community, and how?
- Have you stayed in touch with individuals in SA or did you make a clean cut?
- What advice would you give to a graduate student or a professional in the SA field who is afraid or unsure about pursuing a career change?

IDENTITY

- The YouTube panel you participated in was titled "Student Affairs Expat Panels." Expat usually refers to someone living outside their home country. Do you understand why SA career changers took up this expatriate identity? Does this Expat identity resonate with you in any way? Can you share if you could part with your SA professional identity quickly after your career change, or did it involve a grieving and mourning period? What was it like forming a new professional identity in your new career context?
- Were there critical identity-based factors, such as your gender, ethnicity, class, family background, education, or other salient identities, that shaped your career change? What identities, if any, were most salient and why?

MEANING MAKING

- You talked to Jeannie about your career change in 2020. Do you think the way you think about your career change has shifted since 2020? If so how?
- In the interview with Jeannie, you noted specific reasons why you left? Since leaving SA, have you identified any other reasons for leaving?
- What lessons have you learned from your time in SA and your career change?
- How does this period of career change fit into the rest of your life story? What does this period say about the whole of your life? When you think about the entirety of your career and life story (e.g., various jobs; career change; job searches), what do you think is the common thread?

Closing

It seems like this might be a good place to stop our narrative conversation today. Thank you for covering such a wide range of your career change story. I would like to close by checking-in about your experience. How was this experience for you today? {Pause for reply}. Can I ask how you are feeling after retelling your career change story? {Await reply.} Do you have any additional comments about your career change experience that you would like to share or questions you would like to ask? {Allow for reply.}

Please know I will follow-up with you via email later this week to schedule our second and final interview, which will last around the same time. About a week before we meet for the final interview, I will send you a transcript from today's conversation with my highlighted notes and questions for you to scan as possible points for further discussion during our final interview.

Finally, I will stop the recording now. Many thanks for your time today!

APPENDIX G

NARRATIVE INTERVIEW #2 GUIDE

Hello, {name}! I hope you've been well since we last spoke. How are you doing today? {wait for response}. Thank you for meeting with me again to finish discussing your career change story in this final interview.

Do I have your permission to turn on the recorder and begin recording? {Await reply.} Now that the recorder is on, {name}, I need to gather your verbal consent again to begin recording. {Wait for verbal consent}. Thank you!

I want to briefly revisit key points related to your rights as a participant, as covered in the consent form I previously shared with you.

1. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and you may choose to stop participating at any time. Further, you may refuse to answer any questions asked of you.
2. In terms of study benefits, after today's final narrative interview, I will send you a $50 e-gift card to your email. I want to ensure that {participant's email} is the best place to send you a link to this e-gift card. {wait for response}. If you don't receive anything from me via Rewards Genius by the end of the day, please check your spam folder. If you still do not see anything, please email me and I will troubleshoot with you.
3. Last week, I also sent you the first two completed transcripts I have for you to review for privacy and accuracy. If you need longer than July 3 to review these files and get back to me, please let me know. I will send you one final transcript to review for accuracy and privacy sometime in July for this final interview. Please note, my request for you to review these transcripts is different than my plans to ask you to verify my analysis of your story, which will happen sometime in the fall and for which I will provide you an additional $20 e-gift card. Do you have any questions about these steps/requests?
4. Finally, please briefly think back to your experience during the first interview with me. Have you had any new questions or needs arise related to the study since our first meeting (e.g., about your data, etc.)? Are you still willing to consent to this study and today's final narrative interview? {Await reply.} Thank you again for your consent.

Study Purpose

As a brief reminder, the purpose of my dissertation study is to understand the career change experiences of professionals who left the SA field to pursue work in adjacent or new career industries by inviting participants to co-construct their career change stories with me through the process of narrative conversations. Before we begin today, I want to see if you have any questions about the purpose of this study since we last spoke? {wait for response}. Great, let's begin!

Narrative Interview #2 Prompts:

Today, I'm going to structure our conversation into two parts. In the first part, I will be asking you specific follow-up questions that arose for me while I was transcribing and reviewing your interviews, both the one you did with me in May and the one you did with Jeannie in summer 2020. I sent over these questions to you last week along with your first two transcripts.

These first set of questions are meant to generate additional clarifying details about your career change experience based on what you have already shared. We will spend about 30–35 minutes on this part of the interview today.

In the second part, which will be less structured, I will ask you to pick up your career change story from where you left off in May and to share the end of your story with me. This might also be a good time for you to share any additional reactions or insights you may have had since first speaking with me about this topic. For example, you might have had follow-up conversations with others in your life about your career change since we last spoke or specific examples resurface, which you can cover today if you'd like. Like our first interview, I may ask follow-up questions when necessary to prompt you for additional details about how you experienced and coped with your career change. We will spend 30–35 minutes on this portion of the interview. If at any point you need to take a 5-minute break, please let me know. My goal is to get you out of this meeting by 2:30 PM PDT your time.

Having said that, do you have any questions about the agenda for today's interview? {allow response}. Perfect, let's begin.

<u>Part 1: Follow-Up Narrative Interview #1 Questions (~35 minutes)</u>

- Why did you participate in the panel on career change from student affairs with Jeannie, and what did you hope to achieve by doing so? Are your reasons the same for participating in this study?
- In your opinion, what are the benefits of using online webinars for student affairs career change panels, and why do you think the Expatriates of Student Affairs Facebook group and YouTube were chosen as platforms for sharing the panel you were in?
- Did you use any online resources, in addition to your mentor's help, to cope with your career change? If so, what were they and how helpful were they?
- What does the term Student Affairs Expatriate mean to you, and when did you first here this term?
    - Do you identify as a student affairs expatriate? Why or why not?
- When you shifted from the HR specialist position in ResLife to working for the VPSA, what were your career goals at that time?
- You named a few reasons why you no longer wanted to work in student affairs, such as students who threatened your safety, challenging supervisees, and the difficulty of responsibilities in the Dean of Students position. Were there any additional details about these reasons or any different reasons you want me to include for why you no longer wanted to work in student affairs?
- Did you engage in any side hustles or contingent work while you were working in Student Affairs (e.g., consulting)?
- I want to check a few things for my understanding. You initially met Colleen at [public research university], years prior to your work at [public state university], correct?
- Generally, how many of your peers from your student affairs master's program, supervisees, supervisors, and/or mentors in the field are still in the field today, and how have those relationships evolved over time as you have left the field?
- How can professionals navigate the attitude of disloyalty associated with leaving the student affairs field? What is your perspective on the origins of this attitude, and what

message would you like to convey to professionals who are grappling with this perception while considering a career change?

Part 2: Concluding Your Career Change Story (~35 minutes)

We ended the last interview at the point at which you received two different job offers, one from your VPSA and another from your current employer, and you told your VPSA you would likely go with the non-profit job offer. Plus, at this point of your story, you had also just wrapped up serving as an Interim Dean of Students for a year, which solidified your decision to leave student affairs. You also briefly started to highlight the role your mentor played in helping you navigate the career change.

Given the limited time we have today, I encourage you to identify and detail the significant turning points or events related to your career change between the time you started to update your materials, apply for and interview for jobs outside of student affairs and your current experiences working for your current non-profit employer, including key milestones, hurdles, and accomplishments in your current work. You can also think of these turning points in reverse order or any other order if you'd like. How does this suggestion to focus on key events and turning points in your story between applying for jobs and working in your current job sound to you? {Await reply}. Perfect! You are welcome to resume your story.

Potential Follow-Up Questions

- Can you discuss the strategies you used to navigate the career change process and adapt to the transition? What factors (e.g., relationships; resources; internal dialogue) contributed to your ability to cope with this change?
    - Can you discuss the role your family/mentor, particularly your mother and wife, played in your career journey and the support they provided during your career change?
    - Given your concerns about maintaining security and safety with your career, how did you navigate the career change process to ensure you would still experience safety and security in your new career?
    - What role did your mentor play in your career change? How did their guidance and support contribute to your successful transition?
    - Which transferable skills from student affairs have you employed in your new career, and how? What skills and learning gaps have you had to address?
    - Can you describe the quality of your work and life after your career change and how it compares to your time in student affairs? Can you discuss any specific accomplishments and challenges you've experienced in your current non-profit role and how they compare to your past student affairs career?
- What drew you to pursue a career in HR instead of other fields like consulting or Ed Tech, considering your background in student affairs?
- Can you describe the emotional process of shifting your identity from being a student affairs professional to being an HR manager? Can you describe the process of forming a new professional identity?
- How has your career change influenced your current and future career goals?
- When you think about the whole of your career, is there a metaphor, movie, artwork, song, or image you feel best describes the period of your career change? For example, you noted in first interview with me, your career looks like a jungle gym.

- If you were to reflect on your career change story in 5 to 10 years, how do you think it might be told?
- How might your loved ones, your mom, your wife, your mentor, share your career change story? How might these accounts align or differ from how you have presented the story?
- Based on your career change experience, what lessons would you share with prospective students in student affairs and higher education programs about careers and managing a career change? What insights would you present to student affairs faculty and supervisors about the importance of covering careers and career change with students and supervisees?
- How have your social identities as a Black Queer woman influenced and shaped your career change experiences? For example, in the student affairs field, you found mentors and colleagues who shared similar identities and provided support, allowing you to embrace your identities (e.g., Queer identity). Have you encountered similar experiences of community and support in the non-profit sector after your career change? Additionally, considering your previous concerns about tokenization as a Black woman in the student affairs field, have you had similar experiences in the non-profit sector?

Closing

This seems like a good time to close this final interview. Thank you for being so patient with me as I tried to identify and learn about your career change story and experiences with you. I'm deeply grateful for your willingness to support me and this study.

How was this interview experience for you today? {Pause for reply}. Can I ask how you are feeling after delving deeper into your career change story? {Await reply.} Do you have any additional comments about your career change experience that you would like to share or questions you would like to ask me? {Allow for reply.}

As a reminder, please know I will be reaching out to you shortly with the e-gift card as a small thanks for your participation in this study. Finally, in the fall, I will reach out to you to verify that I am adequately representing/co-constructing your story. To be honest, at this point in the study, I don't know exactly what my fall follow-up request to you will, but what I do know today is that I would like you to spend at least 30–60 minutes reviewing my write-up of your story and/or also providing any details we may have missed in these two interviews. And for that time and request, I will provide an additional $20 e-gift card. If you need anything before this or if you think of anything critical between now and the fall about your experiences, please do not hesitate to write to me. Thanks for your participation {name}, and have a terrific day!