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The Balancing Act Between Student Involvement and Academic Performance

Rocken Roll

Eastern Illinois University

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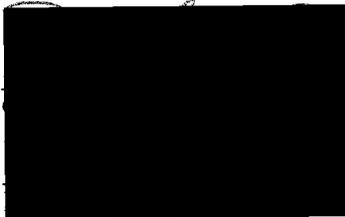
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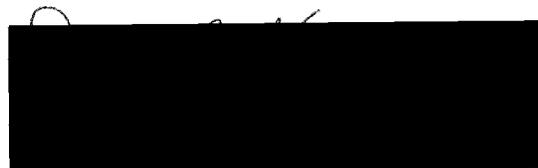
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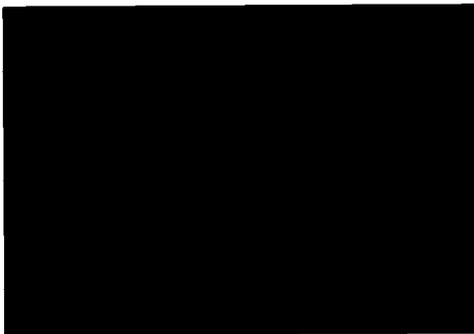
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The Balancing Act Between Student Involvement and Academic Performance

Rocken Roll

Eastern Illinois University

ABSTRACT

A qualitative methodology was utilized to examine student leaders' ability to balance the responsibilities that come with being involved in extracurricular activities and their academic coursework. Through conducting one on one interviews with five participants who are current student leaders at the research site, it was found that student leaders acknowledge that time management and organizational strategies are instrumental to successfully managing their dual roles. However, not all participants were actually utilizing time management and organizational strategies in their day-to-day lives. Participants discussed motivations for involvement in extracurricular activities, positive and negative impacts of their involvement, definitions of success, time management and organizational strategies and the role of advisors. Recommendations for student affairs professionals are provided to increase understanding of how student affairs professionals can help prepare students to successfully manage the responsibilities of their extracurricular involvement and academic coursework.

Keywords: time management, extracurricular involvement, student leaders

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the student leaders who put in countless hours to make the colleges and universities they attend a better place.

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I would like to thank my thesis committee: Dr. Kniess, Dr. Timm and Dr. Yoder for their continuing guidance during the thesis process.

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To my students, Thank you for all that you do, not only for your organizations but also for the campus community as a whole. While the road to success is rarely without obstacles, your drive and passion inspires and motivates me everyday.

I would also like to thank the student leaders who participated in my study for their time and their dedication to enriching the collegiate experience for those around them.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

The modern day college experience is complex: students are constantly faced with the pressure to succeed academically and become a well-rounded individual prepared to thrive in the world outside of academia. Studies have shown that participating in an appropriate level of student involvement may benefit students academically and helps to develop leadership skills, which has positive implications for students' future professional careers (Lei & Yin, 2007). Student involvement is one of the strongest predictors of college students' academic success and personal development (Astin, 1993; Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton & Renn, 2010; Kuh, 2005). In other words, the time and energy that a student invests toward academics and extracurricular activities helps create experiences that enrich the college experience and helps students become successful (Kuh, 2005). However, it is also possible that high levels of student involvement may have negative implications for students' academic success (Svanum & Bigatti, 2006). The potential for students' academic performance to be impacted negatively by their involvement highlights a need for educational institutions (i.e. colleges and universities), and professionals in the field of higher education to understand how students manage the demands of their multiple roles (Ruban & McCoach, 2005; Friedman & Mandel, 2011).

Results from the National Survey for Student Engagement (NSSE) showed that 65% of college freshman were participating in extracurricular activities on their college campuses and 12% of them held a leadership position (NSSE, 2013). Data collected from college seniors showed an increase in student leadership with 34% of college seniors reporting that they have currently or in the past held a leadership position at their institution (NSSE, 2013). However, there was a decrease in senior year students'

participation in extracurricular activities. By their senior year, only 53% of seniors report being involved in extracurricular activities at their institution. With data showing an increase in student leadership, but a decrease in overall involvement on college campuses, it is important for student affairs professionals to gain a greater understanding of how student involvement impacts student leaders during college and why levels of involvement decrease by the time a student reaches their senior year.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine how students were able to balance extracurricular involvement and their academic coursework at a midsized, Midwest university. This study provides insight into how the academic performance of college students was impacted by their extracurricular involvement. In order to examine this relationship, the researcher conducted a qualitative study that utilized interviews with established student leaders. For the purpose of this study, the researcher defined established student leaders as students who were in their third or fourth year of college, currently serving on one or more executive boards at the research site during the spring and fall semesters of 2014.

Research Questions

The research questions that guided the study were as follows:

1. How are student leaders balancing their student involvement and coursework?
2. What strategies are student leaders using to balance their multiple roles and manage the competing demands of their student involvement and academic coursework?

3. How can student affairs professionals assist student leaders with managing their dual roles?

Limitations of the Study

Four limitations were identified in the study: the exclusion of students who were employed in leadership positions, the research only being conducted at only one institution, participants were not asked to disclose their academic major and the role of researcher. Today an increasing number of students are working during their time in college. According to the National Postsecondary Student Aid Society ([NPSAS], 2000), this level of student employment may impact academic performance, particularly if the student is involved in extracurricular activities (Dundes & Marx, 2006). However, due to the complexity of examining the relationship between multiple activities, such as student involvement, student employment, and academic performance this study focused on how nonworking students were able to maintain balance between their extracurricular involvement and their academic course load.

A second limitation for this study, was that research was only conducted at a single institution. As the researcher has access to a specific population of students, it was important to take measures to increase the trustworthiness of the study so that the results of the study would have greater levels of applicability. Another limitation identified for the study was that the researcher did not ask participants to identify their academic major. The level of rigor in participant's academic major may have also been a factor in participant's ability to manage their dual roles. The last limitation for the study was the role of the researcher. Due to the qualitative design of the study, the researcher served as an instrument for the collection and analysis of data.

Significance of the Study

With increasing pressures to succeed in college and become a well-rounded individual, there has been a push for college students to become involved on campus. Therefore, it is important to understand how college students are able to balance the competing demands of their coursework and extracurricular involvements. Studies have shown that involvement in structured activities has a positive impact on college student's ability to transition into the college environment (Tieu, 2010; Ullah & Wilson, 2007). It is also becoming increasingly important to understand how students are impacted by co-curricular group experiences and other forms of student involvement during their time in college (Dugan, 2011).

Definition of Terms

The following is a list of definitions of terms and concepts that are important to understanding the current study:

Academic performance. How well a student meets course expectations as determined by an institution or faculty member and interpreted as course grades or GPA.

Academic success. According to the research institution a student is academically successful if they maintain a cumulative grade point average (GPA) of 2.00 or higher, which is the minimum GPA required by the university before a student is placed on academic probation. For the purpose of this study, academic success was defined as having cumulative grade point average of 3.0 on a 4 point scale (Eastern Illinois University, 2014)

Student involvement. "The amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience" (Astin, 1984, pg. 297).

Student leaders. Students in their third and fourth year at the research site who hold at least one leadership position on an executive board, or with a registered student organization (Komives, Mainella, Longbeam, Osteen & Owen, 2006).

Chapter Summary

The goal of this study was to increase understanding of how student leaders were able to balance the demands of their extracurricular involvement and academic coursework. Chapter I contains the introduction, a statement of purpose, the research questions that guided the current study, limitations of the study, significance of the study, and definition of terms. Chapter II contains a review of the current literature available on student involvement, academic success and balancing strategies of college students.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

This review of the literature will explore the current research on the importance of student involvement in extracurricular activities during the college experience. It will provide a greater understanding of common stressors experienced by college students.

Finally, the literature will review the balancing strategies used by college students to improve their academic success and avoid burnout.

Importance of Student Engagement and Benefits

Traditional college students today, who are between 18 and 24 years old, typically fall under the generational heading of millennial students. According to Howe and Strauss (2000) the millennial generation includes individuals who were born in or after the year 1982. Millennial students have been encouraged by their parents from a young age to seek involvement and participate in extracurricular activities (Elam, 2007; Fredricks, 2012). By participating in extracurricular activities prior to arriving at college and facing pressure to be well-rounded, traditional college students are often carrying their involvement over into their college years (Keeling, 2003).

Regarding student involvement in colleges, there has been a dispute over the percentage of college students who have engaged in some form of student involvement. Examples of this dispute include a study conducted by Knapp (1979) in the late 1970s which found that approximately 80% of traditional undergraduate students were participating in at least one extracurricular activity. In the early 1980s, Baird (1990) found that more than 50% of college students had not participated in student organizations and were predominantly focusing on academics during their time in college. More recently, data from the 2013 National Survey for Student Engagement (NSSE) showed that 65% of first-year students are participating in at least one extracurricular activity (NSSE, 2013). With disagreements in the literature on the amount of participation in extracurricular involvement among college students, it is important to use a standard definition for

student involvement. Alexander Astin developed one of the leading theories of student development in the 1980s. According to Astin (1984), student involvement is defined as:

The amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience. Thus, a highly involved student is one who, for example, devotes considerable energy to studying, spends much time on campus, participates actively in student organizations, and interacts frequently with faculty members and other students” (p. 297).

Research also revealed students who are more involved in student organizations and campus activities develop a greater sense of community than their less involved peers (DeNeui, 2003). Along with developing a sense of community within the college environment, studies have shown that participation in student organizations is a popular form of student involvement on college campuses for both men and women (Case, 2011). Involvement on campus allows these students to engage in high quality college experiences, which in turn helps facilitate a smoother transition to life as a college student (Tieu, 2010). According to an interview done by Richmond (1986) with Alexander Astin, another important impact of student involvement is retention, which has continued importance in the field of higher education. Understanding what impact student engagement had on college students in the past, will allow the researcher to see overarching themes between previously enrolled students and those participating in the current study.

As mentioned previously, Astin (1993) was one of the main contributors to the literature on student involvement. In his book *What Matters in College Four Critical Years Revisited* (1993), Astin examined the impact of peer groups and other collegiate

experiences on undergraduate students. One of Astin's findings was that "almost any form of student involvement in the college experience benefits learning and student development" (Astin, 1993, p.3). One significant source of influence for undergraduate college students was their peer group (Astin, 1993). This student-to-student interaction has wide reaching impacts on both the academic and leadership development of college students. Engaging in student-to-student interaction produced positive effects on student cultural awareness, leadership development, and academic development with an increase in critical thinking and problem solving skills. Astin also found that student-to-student interaction decreased feelings of depression among college students and the belief that the main purpose of attaining a college education was increasing an individual's earning power. The impact of peer groups on college students will help with understanding how peers contribute or detract from involvement in activities and academic coursework.

Along with student-to-student interactions, it is important for colleges and student affairs professionals to create high quality learning environments for students leading to increased levels of student engagement (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005). According to the *Documenting Effective Educational Practice* (DEEP) Project completed by Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, and Whitt (2005), students performed better at colleges and universities that were committed to student success and created positive working relationships between different groups at their institution. Kuh (2005) supported the idea that student engagement was a key element of student success which included two main components. The first component to student engagement, according to Kuh, was the amount of time and energy that students invest in their studies and other purposeful activities. The second component of student engagement was driven by institutions of higher education

representing the resources, support services and opportunities provided by the institution for their students (Kuh, 2005). Opportunities for participation in activities that led to positive experiences and helped students to be successful during their time in college were vital parts of student engagement (Kuh, 2005). Through increased understanding on what factors contribute to student success including involvement, student affairs professionals are able to better serve the needs of their students and help them be successful.

Researchers Huang and Chang (2004) conducted a study in Taiwan that examined the relationship between a student's college experience and student outcomes. The purpose of this study was to examine the nature of the relationship between college student involvement in academic work and their involvement in student clubs and organizations (Huang & Chang, 2004). Huang and Chang (2004) also wanted to discover the optimal combination of levels of involvement in academics and student organizations that lead to student growth. In order to examine the relationship between student involvement in academics and student organizations, the researchers utilized data from the College Experiences Survey which was distributed to college students in Taiwan by Huang and Chang. Results from the College Experiences Survey showed a positive linear relationship between a student's academic and extracurricular involvement (Huang & Chang, 2004). The researchers also found that involvement in extracurricular activities led to an increase in student's cognitive skills (Huang & Chang, 2004). While there appeared to be a positive linear relationship between the academic and extracurricular involvement of college students, the question of over involvement was raised.

Fredricks (2012) examined the over-scheduling hypothesis among high school students. Results from this study found that moderate levels of student involvement in extracurricular activities yielded positive benefits however, there was a threshold where students saw diminishing returns and experienced negative implications. Fredricks also found that there was an increase in the well-being of students that were engaged in at least one extracurricular activity. While extracurricular involvement has positive benefits, it is important to study the potential negative consequences of over-involvement to aid in student success.

Academic Performance and Success

When examining how college students were able to balance the demands of academic responsibilities and extracurricular involvement, it is important to understand the factors that impact their academic performance and success. Increasing the understanding of factors that impact the performance of college students has both theoretical and practical implications for the field of higher education (Friedman & Mandel, 2010). Understanding what factors impact the academic performance and success of college students enables educational institutions and student affairs professionals to better meet the needs of their students, along with helping identify students who may be struggling to attain academic success.

Although some have used the terms “academic performance” and “success” interchangeably, how the terms were defined varies. For example Ani, Toews, Sevin and Purswell (2008) considered students academically successful if their grade point average (GPA) was 2.0 or higher. However, when students were asked what it meant to be academically successful, a specific grade point average was not given. In fact Ani, et al

found that students placed more emphasis on whether their grades met their expectations in determining their level of academic success. This emphasis on student expectations and beliefs about college can also be seen in Harper's (2005) study, which found that students would not decrease their student involvement to increase their grade point average. The reasoning of the college students in Harper's study was strongly impacted by the belief that college was about more than just grades and academic success.

The results from Harper's (2005) study were also supported by a study conducted in 2010 by Strapp and Farr that examined the relationship between level of involvement and the level of satisfaction felt by college students. In their study, Strapp and Farr distributed surveys to 71 graduating seniors at Western Oregon University. Results from their survey showed that involvement in extracurricular activities led to an increase in the degree of satisfaction students had with their college experience. According to this study, there was no correlation between student satisfaction and grade point average. Strapp and Farr also suggested that if an individual solely focused on academics and excluded extracurricular involvement, then that may in fact lead to decreased feelings of satisfaction with their collegiate experience. These studies provide insight into the motivation behind the engagement of college students in extracurricular activities and showed that students believe achieving success in college extends beyond succeeding in the classroom. The research also helps highlight the importance of having faculty members who are supportive of student involvement outside the classroom environment (Harper, 2005; Strapp & Farr, 2010).

Research over the past few decades has also increased understanding of the importance of a student's grade point average as a measure of academic success

(Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). According to a study conducted by Svanum and Bigatti (2006), one factor that predicted student's academic success in a college course was the amount of course effort by students. Course effort in the study was defined by students' participation in the following activities: attending a lecture, doing assigned reading, and studying. Using course effort as a predictor of success in a course as well as academic success overall may play a key role in future studies on the success of college students in collegiate level courses. Clark and Latshaw (2012) found other factors that affected student performance. In this study, Clark and Latshaw analyzed survey data that was collected from undergraduate business students who were enrolled in an introductory accounting course. Their study found that the single most significant factor in the prediction of college student performance was grade point average followed by course attendance and course effort. Studies such as those conducted by Clark and Latshaw (2012) and Svanum and Bigatti (2006) showed the importance of course effort, along with other factors, in predicting the academic success of college students.

Additional factors that impacted the academic performance and success of college students were time dedicated to studying and the study habits of college students (Nonis & Hudson, 2010). A study by Nonis and Hudson (2010) showed that while the amount of time spent studying impacted student performance, this impact was moderated by the study habits being utilized by the participants. Other factors that impacted the academic performance of college students were student self-efficacy, class size, and achievement goals (Fenollar, Roman, & Cuestas, 2007). The level of a student's self-efficacy had the greatest positive impact through deep processing of their academic

performance. Another implication from the study was that smaller class size had a positive effect on student academic performance.

Ullah and Wilson (2007) conducted a study to understand how student's academic success was associated with student involvement. They believed that "pairing information regarding student engagement to academic achievement can provide institutions with yet another perspective of what influences academic success" (Ullah & Wilson, 2007, p.1). Through pairing student engagement and academic achievement and success, Ullah and Wilson utilized Astin's (1984) theory of involvement, which states: "students' involvement may take place in several forms such as academic activities, co-curricular activities, and interaction with peers, faculty and administration" (Ullah & Wilson, 2007, p. 2). Understanding Astin's theory of involvement as applied not only to student involvement, but also to the academic setting can help researchers to understand how involvement impacts academic performance and the success of college students.

Stressors and Demands of College

The years students are enrolled at a college or university have been described as one of the most highly stressful time periods in an individual's life (Welle & Graf, 2011). The transition to college affects levels of stress in college students lives. College students create a special population, who are exposed to increased levels of stressors, which has resulted in an increased susceptibility to stress (Welle & Graf, 2011; Ross, Niebling, Heckert, 1999). Several studies have been conducted to identify stressors that are common to college students (Murphy & Archer, 1996; Misra & McKean, 2000; Ross, Niebling, Heckert, 1999; Welle & Graf, 2011).

A study by Ross, Niebling, and Heckert (1999) utilized the *Student Stress Survey* to determine what the major stressors are for college students. The *Student Stress Survey* consists of approximately 40 stressful situations that address the following sources of stress: academic, interpersonal, intrapersonal and environmental (Ross, Niebling & Heckert, 1999). Results from surveys completed by 100 students at a Midwestern university found that items that were classified as daily hassles were reported at a higher rate than major life events as sources of stress. This study found that college students reported their top five contributions to stress were changes in sleeping habits, eating habits, vacations from school, and increases in workload, or new responsibilities, indicating that the stressors among college students are both academic and personal. Results from the *Student Stress Survey* also showed that the area of stress that was most often reported by college students were intrapersonal (Ross, Niebling & Heckert, 1999).

The findings from Ross, Niebling & Heckert (1999) study were congruent with a study by Murphy and Archer (1996) that provided a comparison of stressors on college campuses between 1985 to 1993. The purpose of Murphy and Archer's (1996) study was to address how the stressors on a university campus change over time. In the 1996 study, the researchers sample consisted of 639 students who were attending a large university located in the Southeast. Students in the sample were enrolled in undergraduate courses in a variety of departments and consisted of freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors (Murphy & Archer, 1996). In this study, the researchers grouped stressors into two major groups, personal and academic. When reviewing the data presented in this study, the researchers found that while there were similarities between the data sets from 1985 to 1993, college students reported that main areas of stress were tests and finals, grades and

competition, too many demands, intimate relationships, conflicts between parental expectations, and finances. In the comparison between college student stressors in 1985 and 1993, the researchers found that students in the 1993 sample reported an increase in stressors related to finances, current jobs, competition among peers, studying, and grades in comparison to the sample from 1985 (Murphy & Archer, 1996). Having an understanding of common stressors college students experienced during the 1980s and 1990s will allow the researcher to compare and contrast the stressors experienced by the participants in this study to the stressors that previous students encountered during their time in college.

Burnout

The concept of burnout among college students is was an area of concern, particularly when looking at students who are involved in extracurricular activities (Kao, 2009; Lenaghan & Sengupta, 2007; Hardy & Dodd, 1998). Hardy and Dodd, conducted a study in 1998 on resident assistants who were overseeing first-year or mixed floors through the use of survey data. Through analysis of the collected data, Hardy and Dodd noticed that the students included in their sample who were handling multiple responsibilities, conflicting roles, constant demands for problem solving, and continued interaction with people were more prone to experiencing feelings of stress and burnout when the stress from their multiple roles were paired with academic stressors (Hardy & Dodd, 1998). According to Kopelman, Greenhaus, and Connolly (1983) and Rothbard (2001), college students are faced with opposing pressures from their engagement in multiple roles, which cause students to complete the responsibilities of their multiple

roles with limited time resources. The current study hopes to increase understanding of how student leaders are impacted by stress and the resources that they use to manage it.

Time Management and Balancing Strategies

Incorporating time management and balancing strategies into an individual's routine has increased productivity and overall success (Morgenstern, 2004; Alexander & Dobson, 2009). According to time management experts, there were several tools and strategies that individuals utilized to manage their time effectively and increase productivity (Covey, 1989; Alexander & Dobson, 2009; Morgenstern, 2004; Alexander, 1992). Maintaining a strong grasp of time management was an important factor for the success of college students as a whole and those engaged in both academic and extracurricular activities. According to Alexander (1992), there were several aspects of successful time management which included: breaking down tasks into smaller manageable pieces, making and maintaining to-do lists, working on one task at a time, and making a conscious commitment to achieve specific goals.

In order for individuals to successfully manage their time, they needed to understand the classic principles of time control (Alexander & Dobson, 2009). According to Alexander and Dobson (2009), the principles of time control were well established and can be used to help individuals assert more control over the time that they actually have to accomplish their goals. In the book *Real Time Management (2009)*, the classic principles of time control included: making a list, assigning priorities, doing first-things first, work with one item at a time until time runs out or the task is completed.

One important aspect of time management is being able to prioritize the many tasks that are a part of daily life (Morgenstern, 2004; Alexander & Dobson, 2009). One

strategy used to prioritize daily tasks is the WADE Formula, which helped individuals prioritize and sort their daily tasks (Morgenstern, 2004). The four steps of the WADE Formula were as follows: 1. Write it down: write down all of your to do's in a single reliable location. 2. Add it up: Estimate how long each task is going to take to complete. 3. Decide: use the four D's – delete, delay, delegate and diminish to determine what task you will actually complete. 4. Execute your plan: complete your decided plan without the hindrance of procrastination (Morgenstern, 2004). Using the WADE Formula is just one strategy to help prioritize the tasks on your to do list. Another way for college students to help manage their time is to come up with clear specific objectives and goals for what they want to accomplish. By writing down specific goals, students identified activities that will help them reach their goals. Alexander (1992) defined specific objectives as “written, measureable, realistic, attainable and linked to specific dates” (pg. 37). Through having a greater understanding of time management the researcher will be able to see if the students in the study utilized time management techniques in their role as students.

Chapter Summary

The above literature review contained studies highlighting the importance of student involvement in the college experience. Astin's (1984) theory of student involvement, the academic performance and success of college students, common stressors that impact college students, burnout and balancing strategies were outlined. The literature on student involvement reveals that participation in student activities helps to promote student learning inside and outside of the classroom environment, facilitate a smooth transition to college and provides students with fulfilling collegiate experiences. Over the past couple of decades, researchers have found that students' academic

performance and success are impacted by multiple factors such as course effort, self-efficacy, student involvement, study habits and goal setting. Researchers have also indicated that college students are particularly prone to effects of multiple stressors stemming from academic and personal sources. According to the literature, researchers are trying to increase understanding of how college students are impacted by extracurricular activities and ways that they balance their multiple roles and utilize time management strategies in order to achieve academic success. Chapter three will discuss the methods used to conduct the current study.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

The purpose of the current qualitative study was to examine how college students are able to balance their extracurricular involvement and academic coursework at a midsized, Midwest University.

Institution

The research site for the current study was a predominantly White, midsized university located in the Midwest. At the time of data collection, there were 186

Registered Student Organizations (RSO) that were recognized by the institution.

According to data collected during Fall of 2013 there were 9,775 students enrolled at the research site. Student demographics showed that during the Fall 2013 semester there were 8,347 undergraduate students enrolled at the research site. Out of the 8,347 undergraduate students 7,327 were considered to be full time students, and 1,020 were classified as part-time students.

Design of study

The focus of the study was how undergraduate student leaders in their third or fourth year of college balanced involvement in extracurricular activities with their academic obligations throughout their time in college. Due to the unique nature of an individual student's experiences, a qualitative research design was utilized and one-on-one interviews were conducted in the spring and fall semesters of 2014. Qualitative studies focus on attaining in-depth information that has been impacted by the participant's environment and personal experiences (Krefting, 1991). Attaining in-depth information from participants about their experiences surrounding student involvement and academics is vital to the success of the current study. Therefore, the researcher has decided to utilize a qualitative research design to increase the depth of the studies findings (Krefting, 1991).

Participants

Participants in the current study consisted of five upper-class undergraduate student leaders who currently serve on executive boards, or a hold a leadership position in at least one Registered Student Organization (RSO) at the time of data collection. The researcher also used gatekeepers selected from the student affairs division at the research

site. These gatekeepers helped the researcher to find a representative sample of the student leaders at the research site to participate in the study. For the purpose of the current study, the researcher looked at student leaders who were not currently employed. The researcher decided to exclude student leaders who held a paid position or other form of employment from their study as a way to limit the issues impacting a student's ability to balance their dual roles. After verifying that potential participants were not currently employed, invitations to participate in an individual interview were distributed through campus email. Each member of the sample participated in an individual interview with the researcher ranging from fifteen to twenty minutes in length discussing their student involvement experiences and the balancing strategies that they have used during their undergraduate career.

A purposive, non-random sample was used for the current study. A purposive sample is a non-random sample that is determined by the researcher, based upon their prior knowledge about the individuals they are selecting to participate in the study (Fraenkel, Wallen & Hyun, 2012). Using a purposive sample allowed the researcher to be intentional in the selection of participants and ensure that the participant's student involvement was diverse. This also allowed the researcher to increase the trustworthiness of the study, by not only focusing on a single area of student involvement (i.e. student life), but rather student involvement as a whole. This process increases the transferability of the study's findings so that they can be applied to other groups of students (Krefting, 1991).

Participant 1: Jenna a 21 year old Caucasian female, who at the time of the interview was involved in American Marketing Association, Order of Omega, a

PanHellenic Sorority and the Warbler. Jenna described herself as an organized and responsible student leader who works well with others. According to the self disclosed demographic sheet, Jenna had a cumulative grade point average of 3.44 and spent approximately 10-12 hours a week on her student involvement roles.

Participant 2: Raina a 21 year old African American female, who at the time of the interview was involved in the Diversity Action Council, and a National Pan Hellenic Council sorority. Rania described herself as an encouraging and understanding student leader. According to the self disclosed demographic sheet, Rania had a cumulative grade point average of 2.8 and spent about 7 hours a week on her student involvement roles.

Participant 3: Thomas a 21 year old Caucasian male, who at the time of the interview was involved in the Residence Hall Association. Thomas described himself as a laid back student leader who leads by action. According to the self disclosed demographic sheet, Thomas had a cumulative grade point average of 3.25 and spent between 5 and 6 hours a week on his student involvement roles.

Participant 4: Anthony a 24 year old Biracial male, who at the time of the interview was involved in a National Pan Hellenic Council fraternity, Harvesting Dreams, and the Black Student Union. Anthony described himself as a demanding and dedicated student leader who is task oriented. According to the self-disclosed demographic sheet, Anthony had a cumulative grade point average of 2.69 and spent over 30 hours a week on his student involvement roles.

Participant 5: Riley a 20 year old Caucasian male, who at the time of the interview was involved in a North American Interfraternity Council fraternity. Riley described himself as a direct student leader who leads by example. According to the self-

disclosed demographic survey, Riley had a cumulative Grade Point Average of 2.95 and spent about 10 hours a week on his student involvement roles.

Data Collection

Interviews took place in interview rooms located in an academic building. This location was chosen due to the room's video and audio recording capabilities. Both video and audio recording were utilized during the study. Utilizing video and audio recording allowed the researcher to have access to the participant interviews in a complete and accurate state after the completion of the interview, which aided in the transcription process by allowing the researcher's transcription to reflect an accurate understanding of the conversation and perspective conveyed by the participant during the interview process, in turn increasing the interpretive validity (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2006).

By utilizing a qualitative methodology, the researcher was able to collect in-depth information about student's motivations to become involved in extracurricular activities, the amount of involvement that students are engaged in, how their involvement has impacted their college experience, and what strategies they have implemented to balance between their multiple roles. The interview was also used to collect data on participants' student involvement and their academic history. For interview questions see Appendix A

Data Analysis

Data were collected in the form of individual interviews over a three month time period. After each interview session, the researcher utilized the recordings of the session to create a transcript of the interview and assigned each participant a pseudonym. The

researcher then coded the transcription looking for reoccurring or prominent themes found throughout the interview (Creswell, 2009). The researcher utilized the following coding process to analyze the data collected during individual interviews with the participants. After transcriptions of the interviews were completed the researcher pre-coded by highlighting significant passages and quotes from the individual transcriptions (Saldana, 2013). The researcher then read the highlighted passages and grouped them into overarching themes and subthemes. The codes were organized in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet for each transcription that organized the codes by theme, subtheme, and line number (Saldana, 2013). After transcribing and coding all of the participant interviews the researcher then analyzed the transcriptions as a whole to determine if there were patterns between the participants of the study.

Role of the Researcher

Because the study was conducted utilizing a qualitative methodology it is important to recognize the role of the researcher and how their role impacted the data collection process. According to Creswell (2009), the researcher is often engaged in an extended and thorough data collection process with their participants, which factors into the interpretive nature of qualitative research. Creswell also stated that the researchers background, values, and history informs how data collected from qualitative research is interpreted. As the primary researcher for the current study, it is important for me to acknowledge how my background and experiences have shaped my interest in studying student leaders, and my motivation for wanting to gain insight into the strategies and techniques that current student leaders are utilizing to manage their dual roles.

During my childhood and teenage years, I was always involved in extracurricular activities. This involvement carried over when I went away to college to attain my bachelor's degree. As an undergraduate student I was heavily involved in several different extracurricular organizations and held leadership positions across campus in both student organizations and different campus departments and earned a leadership studies minor. After graduating with my bachelor's degree, I began working as an advisor to several student groups as a part of my graduate assistantship. In my role as an graduate advisor, I work with student leaders on a daily basis and it was in this role that I became increasingly interested in the techniques that student leaders were using to manage their dual roles.

Treatment of Data

All data collected from the participants over the course of the study was kept confidential and secure according to guidelines set in place by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the research site. Data collected over the course of the study will be destroyed after three years per the institution's IRB policy. One way confidentiality was maintained was through the use of pseudonyms. All participants in the study were given pseudonyms as a way to ensure their confidentiality. Besides the primary researcher, data collected over the course of the study was only accessible to the individual participants and the members of the primary researcher's thesis committee. The thesis chair reviewed the interview transcripts with the researcher to assist in looking for themes.

Chapter Summary

Chapter three contains the purpose of the study, design, descriptions of the participant selection process and methods of data collection and analysis. A qualitative study was conducted to provide a deeper understanding of the ability of college students to balance their academic responsibilities and extracurricular involvement. Chapter Four will provide the results of the study.

CHAPTER IV

Results

The purpose of the current study was to examine how students balance extracurricular involvement and their academic coursework at a midsized, Midwest university. The researcher hoped that insight into how the academic performance of college students was impacted by their extracurricular involvement would be obtained

through interviews with student leaders, currently enrolled at the research site. The purpose of Chapter IV is to present the main themes that emerged through a qualitative analysis, of one-on-one interviews that were conducted with five participants. During the course of the qualitative analysis the following themes emerged: definitions of success, motivations for involvement, life balance, positive impacts of involvement, negative impacts of involvement, importance of time management and organization, time management strategies, organization strategies, advisors and student recommendations. The themes that emerged during the analysis of the interviews are organized by research question.

Definitions of Success

Although the definitions of success does not specially fall under the research questions for the current study, it is important to understand how student leaders defined success as this shapes how they viewed their college experience. Each participant was asked to define what success means to them and their responses differed. Jenna, a 21 year old female, stated that success to her was “Setting goals for yourself and then making those goals happen.” Thomas, a 21 year old male, believed that success was “accomplishing whatever you set out to do and that you are able to see tangible results.” Riley, a 20 year old male, reported that success meant “being surrounded by good people, having wealth and being both socially and economically successful and having power.” When asked to define success Rania, a 21 year old female, reported that “my definition of being successful would be doing things that not only make you happy but will also benefit people around you. So not only are you nurturing your own growth but you’re helping other people grow as well”. Anthony, a 24 year old Black/Caucasian male,

believed that success is when “preparation and opportunity meet. When the things you have been preparing to do become great and you get the opportunity to showcase your talent, and you take that opportunity and you thrive”.

During the interview, all participants were asked to define what it means to be academically successful during college. A common theme that emerged from the interviews was that the majority of participants did not associate academic success with a specific grade point average. Rather, participants associate academic success with going to classes, trying your best, and getting good grades. According to Jenna you are academically successful if “you’re trying your best, even if you don’t get an A on an exam you know that you studied and tried the best that you could.” Rania reported that academic success was:

Being involved with your classes, making sure that you are going to classes, making sure that you participate in class, making sure that your professor knows you as a person as well as a student and also having academic integrity and knowing that your grades should come first.

Riley stated that being “academically successful, I would say is going to all your classes, getting good grades and test scores, understanding the knowledge. So not just regurgitating something on the test but actually learning”. Out of all of the participants Anthony was the only one who associated being academically successful with a specific grade point average. During the interview Anthony, said that: “to be academically successful you have to have a GPA of at least a 3.25.”

Participant responses show that definitions of success differ among college students. When asked about general success, participant responses highlighted two commonalities. Jenna and Thomas's definitions of success focused on accomplishing goals and attaining tangible results. Other participant responses, however, discussed more abstract concepts such as showcasing your talent, and nurturing the growth of yourself and others. When asked about academic success participant responses also differed. Out of five participants only Anthony believed that a specific grade point average was needed to be considered academically successful. Responses from the remaining participants focused on attending classes, being engaged in the classroom experiences, trying your best, and getting good grades.

Motivations for Involvement

When asked about motivations for becoming involved in extracurricular activities at the research site the following three themes emerged: involvement at a previous institution, meeting new people, and seeing the impact that other student leaders were having at the research site. Three of the participants stated that they wanted to get involved at the research site because of the impact of other student leaders. Jenna stated that she wanted to get more involved on campus during her freshman year because, "within my sorority there were student leaders who were involved in multiple organizations and I wanted to be like them." Thomas's response also indicated that his decision to become involved on campus was impacted by another student, "I had a friend who pushed me to start getting involved."

Previous involvement during high school or at a previous institution also emerged as a motivation for involvement for three of the five participants. According to their

interviews, Rania and Jenna reported that they were involved in high school and that when they arrived at college they looked for opportunities to get involved. Jenna stated that “I was involved all throughout junior high school so I think being involved is just in my nature.” When asked about her motivation to get involved Rania’s response was related to her past experiences:

In high school like we always had to do community service, no matter what. So that was just kind of instilled in me. So when I got to campus I just looked for community service opportunities and then I met other people that were in other organizations that invited me to different organizations and that’s how I got started.

Anthony also attributed his motivation to become involved in extracurricular activities at the research site with involvement at a previous institution:

Well I was involved on the campus before I came here so I just kinda kept the ball rolling. I was one of those students who knew where I messed up in life and did everything to get back on point and that ball just kept rolling. I never stopped it so I just kept being involved and I still haven’t put a leash on it, it’s my life now.

The last theme to emerge was the desire to meet new people. Riley stated that he wanted to get involved in extracurricular activities so he could meet new people. Riley responded that as a freshman “you don’t know anyone. I had a random roommate and we ended up joining the same fraternity. So I would say I decided to get involved so that I could meet new people.”

Motivations for involvement included the following themes: previous experience with extracurricular activities in high school or at previous institutions, wanting to meet

new people, and encouragement from peers to get involved. This speaks to the importance of peer groups in encouraging involvement of undergraduate students.

Research Question #1: How are student leaders balancing their student involvement and coursework?

Life Balance

When looking at how student leaders are balancing their student involvement roles and academic coursework it is important to look at how students personal lives were impacted by their involvement in extracurricular activities. One way that the researcher looked at student leaders ability to balance their dual roles was by asking participants how much time they spent on themselves per week, which looked at time they were not investing in academic pursuits or in their extracurricular involvement. When asked what percentage of time they spent on themselves during a week all participants reported spending somewhere between eight percent and twenty five percent of their week on themselves. Jenna reported that she spent “maybe ten percent of my time [on myself]. Not a lot at all.” Similarly Anthony reported that he spent about two to three hours a day on himself, which equals eight percent. Riley stated that he spends “about twenty five percent” of his time on himself.

Throughout each interview, participants discussed the different ways that they try to maintain balance in their lives. Common themes that emerged were spending time communicating with family and friends, scheduling time for themselves, and doing activities to relax. Riley reported that he maintains balance in his life by “hanging out with my friends. When I’m stressed it definitely helps me keep my head on and not lose

my mind just doing homework all day everyday.” To maintain balance in her life Rania utilized multiple techniques:

I go on walks. Nice long walks. I listen to music. Sometimes I meditate if things are really getting crazy and what else do I do. I talk to people. I think that’s what we forget. You don’t want too much pressure on your mind so just let it out, just talk.

When asked about maintaining life balance Jenna turned to her family for support.

Well I’m really close with my family so I make sure to call my family at least once a day and obviously I’m in touch with my friends at all times but then I make sure to schedule homework prior to meetings or schedule it after meetings so I can achieve it all.

One commonality that the participants shared was the amount of time that they spent on themselves over the course of the week. Participants indicated that over the course of the week the majority of their time was spent on their extracurricular involvement or academics, spending between eight and twenty five percent of their time on themselves. Common strategies for integrating life balance included spending time with family and friends, scheduling in time for themselves and engaging in stress relief activities like meditation and listening to music.

Positive Impacts of Involvement

Participants in the study believed that becoming involved in extracurricular activities during their time in college had been a positive experience and impacted them in a positive manner. Positive impacts of involvement reported were: learning about themselves, increased time management skills, improved academics, and acquiring

transferable skills. During her interview, Jenna stated that becoming involved on campus and gaining leadership positions had helped her to maintain a high grade point average.

For most of my leadership roles you have to have a certain grade point average to even have them. So it pushed me to continue to do well in my classes. I think it has also made me feel more comfortable that I can approach my teachers.

Rania also reported a similar impact on her academics:

I actually think that student involvement helped me academically because I'm always busy and can't take a break. Not that I can't take a break but if I always have something to do then I can never forget that I have something to do. Because you gotta do this by a certain time...so academically I've actually excelled by being involved on campus.

When asked about how his involvement in extracurricular activities has impacted his time in college, Thomas mostly focused on the development of his time management skills; “[Being involved] has helped me manage my time well.” Another theme that was reported by participants was networking and relationship building. Rania stated that her involvement was:

Something that opened a lot of networking doors for me. I get to talk to different people from different schools. Professors that I typically I would just walk straight passed, I'm starting to actually build relationships with them and I feel like that's really important, especially going to a college institution.

Similarly Jenna reported that being involved in extracurricular activities has:

Definitely made [my college experience] a lot better because you get to meet so many more people than if you were just sitting at home by yourself. It's been a

great experience that I know I am going to be able to take with me to the workforce and it's been so much fun.

Learning about yourself and developing as a leader was another theme that emerged over the course of the interviews. Participants reported that their extracurricular involvement helped them to learn about themselves in ways that were not acquired during their academic classes. During his interview, Anthony spoke about the importance of his involvement outside the classroom at length:

College is like more than just the grades to me. It isn't about the grades you make it's the hands you shake, because the grades are kind of mandatory to me. So being involved, it scopes your whole experience at whatever college you're at. People start to know you for certain things and you start to learn about yourself, so not only that but it's a huge time commitment...it will really be a time commitment if you make it. With me I've been very passionate about things I'm doing. Its really become a focus of why I'm at school because I'm learning about myself. I can always go to a lecture hall and sit with my eyes closed and listen to the teacher you know? But the things that you do as a student leader you are constantly doing all day long. That's like teaching yourself rather than being taught.

Participants in the current study indicated that their involvement in extracurricular activities impacted their collegiate experience by helping them develop their time management skills, providing opportunities to network, learning about themselves and providing opportunities to develop their leadership skills. Jenna and Rania also believed

that being involved in extracurricular activities has had an overall positive impact on their academics, during their time in college.

Negative Impacts of Involvement

Overall, participants spoke highly of their involvement in extracurricular activities; however, it is important to note that they did recognize that at times their involvement did impact them negatively. While there were participants who believed that their extracurricular involvement had a positive impact on their academics, this was not the case for all participants. Negative impacts of involvement that emerged were mostly centered on not having enough time in the day and struggling to balance the competing demands from student organizations and academic coursework. When asked about the impact of his student involvement on academics, Riley stated that “If I wasn’t involved in anything I would probably be a slightly better student” and “I would say [being involved] definitely has positive aspects but there are definitely negative aspects to my grades.” Similarly Anthony reported that:

[Being involved] has had a huge impact on my grades. When I first came here I had a 3.25, and me wanting to naturally be involved in everything I started to find myself up doing other things and you interact with friends. And you know, your friends are in your organizations so rather than me sitting at home doing homework and then zoning out for an hour to study I could be sitting there and a text message would come through from one of my friends, granted they’re also in my organization with me so now that’s a business standpoint; so now you’re like let me respond to them and before you know it your mind is somewhere else. If I had a dollar for every time that happened I probably wouldn’t even need to go to

school. But that does have a huge impact and that is probably the hardest thing that you find yourself doing, realizing that you really need to stop. Just stop right now and do your academics. So it has a huge impact on your school experience.

When asked how often his academics were negatively impacted by his student involvement Anthony shared that it was:

More often than I thought it would be. Probably at least twice a week. About two or three times a week it will affect my schoolwork. Whether it be a deadline, like your homework was due on D2L at three, but I've been in [fraternity] chapter since noon and I failed to do it the night before because of something else. And I've put it off and put it off and now I'm going to blame it on the chapter because I didn't do it while I was sleeping, So probably two to three times a week.

When asked about the frequency of this negative impact Riley believed that it was about "one time out of ten." While there were participants who reported extracurricular involvement impacting their academics positively, Anthony and Riley's responses indicate that this is not completely the case.

Research Question #2: What strategies are student leaders using to balance their multiple roles and manage the competing demands of their student involvement and academic coursework?

Questions from this portion of the interview were centered on strategies that student leaders utilized to balance their dual roles. Results from this portion of the interview can be broken down into the following themes: importance of time management and organization, time management strategies, organization strategies, and life balance.

Importance of Time Management and Organization

During the interview all participants in the study were asked how they thought they managed their time. All participants indicated that time management was an important aspect of their life and believed they managed their time effectively. Jenna stated that time management was “the one time thing that I can pride myself on, I have really good time management skills.” Similarly, Thomas indicated that as he has gotten involved he has “gotten pretty good at managing my time.” Rania stated “I think I manage my time wisely, especially when dealing with different organizations. I’ve learned that you basically have to use every hour of the day. It can be hard at times but overall its manageable”.

Riley, the only participant who was not as confident in his time management skills, reported that he probably “could put more time toward it.”

Each participant spoke to the importance of time management and organization as a student and student leader. All of the participants acknowledged that having the ability to effectively manage their time and stay organized was an essential component of being successful as a student and student leader. Jenna reported that “time management and organization is really important especially if you want to be involved in a lot and do well in school. I think you also need to be organized so that you set yourself up for success”.

Rania also spoke to the importance of having good time management:

Time management is everything. It helps you to go about your day and know that you have certain time for your course work, time for your work in your organizations, and time to rest. I think that knowing how to manage time is essential.

Out of the participants, Riley was the only one that focused on the importance of organization and how it affects others in his fraternity. Based on his experiences as the recruitment chair for his organization Riley stated that “ it helps to stay as organized as possible. If you are able to have everything planned and organized it makes things easier for everyone.”

Time Management Strategies

While all participants in the current study indicated the importance of time management strategies to successfully managing their dual roles only three participants discussed strategies that they use to manage their time. Jenna and Rania both scheduled in specific times of the day to work on course work and business for their organizations. In order to manage her time effectively Rania stated that:

Typically I do my schoolwork right after my classes so I know I have that time for work and later in the afternoon that's when I start on things for my organizations if I'm not already in meetings because they start later on in the evening. So its kind of a good balance daytime school work, nighttime organizations and then sometimes in between happens.

According to his interview, Thomas utilized planning a head to manage his time and accomplish tasks. Thomas stated that to accomplish tasks he looks at “how much time I actually have. I know if I have a six to eight page paper it's going to take me a few hours or a few days, spread out a couple hours a day.” While all five participants indicated that time management was important to them, only three indicated that they were utilizing time management strategies in their day to day life. Some participants had specific times

set aside for coursework and organizational work. Others did not have scheduled times but organized their work based on the length of the project.

Organization Strategies

Organizational strategies were utilized to balance academic course work and extracurricular involvement by all participants in the current study. The three most common organizational tools are as follows: planners and or calendars, smartphones, and having different binders for each class and organization. When asked what they considered to be their number one tool for organization three participants responded that they relied heavily on the use of a planner or calendar. One participant reported that she utilized both a hard copy planner and an electronic calendar to remain organized:

I always have a calendar with me, always write down appointments, and I always write down meetings. They're either in an alarm that's in my phone or they're on the calendar where I can see it and if I'm reminded by seeing it or by the loud noise then I just know.... I would say my calendar but that's a very hard question because I use so many things. Okay, so my number one tool for organization I would have to say is my planner. Yeah my planner, I have all of the sticky notes, all of anything that I need to know written down.

During her interview Jenna stated "I have three planners, that I write down basically every minute of every day and if I have lots of meetings or if I know I have a lot of homework that I need to get done I schedule it in." When asked to identify his number one tool for organization, Anthony also reported that his number one tool for organization was also a planner. However, he believes that there are also downsides to using a planner as an organizational tool. Anthony stated that:

The only problem is that I feel like a long term effect of the planner is that it will end up making you forget a lot of things in life. You'll start to become so focused on, "oh I got this deadline" because you have so many deadlines that you have to meet your writing them down in your planner and then now someone takes your planner from you, you're like ... "well now I got to get a piece of paper and start writing everything down." You can't think for yourself now. That's the only problem that I have with it. But it is the almighty planner still.

Thomas and Riley both reported that the number one tool that they utilized for staying organized was their smartphone. While Thomas also utilized calendars and planners he stated that his phone was number one tool for organization:

I know that's weird to say. When I'm just sitting there for five minutes I'll sit there and check my email and I'll see that like five people emailed me and get them back. It holds all my events that I have to do and my meetings.

Unlike Thomas, the only organizational tool that Riley mentioned during his interview was his smartphone.

I would say I use my phone to remind me of everything. Like put everything in my phone that I need to do all week and check it off the list every time... My phone keeps me on track one hundred percent of the time.

According to participant responses, common organizational strategies included the utilization of planners, calendars, and smartphones. The use of these tools enabled participants to keep track of course deadlines, tests, and organizational commitments.

Research Question #3: How can student affairs professionals assist student leaders with managing their dual roles?

The last area of focus for the interviews was sources of support that student leaders identified within their undergraduate experience. Participants reported that they found support in the form of other student leaders, friends, family, and advisors. When asked to identify role models, four of the five participants referenced others student leaders at the research site. According to Rania, previous student leaders at the research institution were her role models because “they really were an inspiration because you see them stepping up to make a change or make a difference, or even just stepping up to help other students and I really appreciated that.”

Advisors

While the research question was directly towards student affairs professionals, the researcher asked interview questions that focused on the role and impact of advisors to student organizations with the hope that participant responses could be applied to student affairs professionals working in other functional areas. While not directly named as role models by participants in the study, one important source of support for undergraduate students came in the form of advisors. When asked to discuss the relationship that they have with advisors, participants reported having positive relationships. Rania stated:

I do have good relationships with a lot of my advisors. I feel like that is because they have the ability to actually sit down and talk to you and actually respect you as a person. They not only see you like a student, or as a worker or whatever you are to them, but actually build personal relationships with them. So that's something that's a plus.

Participants in the study also spoke about the varying level of involvement and commitment from their advisors. Riley felt that his fraternity advisors are very active in the fraternity:

They definitely keep us on the right track when sometimes we could stray away. You know they definitely know what they are talking about and they are good at taking the situation and spinning it into something that will help us be better.

Similarly Thomas reported high levels of involvement from his advisors in the Residence Hall Association (RHA):

With my RHA advisors we are pretty close because we have one on ones every week and then we have the regular meetings and the executive board so we see each other quite a lot and I work directly with them too. To make sure the budgets are in order.

While Anthony believed that the relationships with his advisors had been good overall he reported that, this was not always the case: “Last year my advisor for my fraternity, he never really talked to us at all, he never really came around. This year we got a new advisor, and he is always available. Great dude.”

Participants were also asked about their advisors level of support when it came to academics. According to interview responses, participants indicated that advisors were supportive of their academics and understood that while students are involved in extracurricular activities they are at the research institution to get a college degree. When asked if his advisors were supportive of his academics, Riley stated:

Of course. That’s their number one focus obviously. Which is good. My fraternity has top grades, you know they definitely keep us on our school. It’s definitely a

priority within the organization. Which is a very attractive feature and why I joined.

Similarly when asked about the support of her advisors, Jenna responded “Oh definitely. I mean they know that that’s why you’re here in the first place and always want you to put your schoolwork first.” Rania also identifies that her advisors are supportive of her academics and future endeavors:

I believe my advisors are supportive of my academics because they know um I came here first for a career besides anything else and they are always reminding me to make sure I’m on top of my schoolwork at the end of the day.

Participant responses indicated that advisors play a supporting role in the lives of their students not only in regard to their extracurricular involvement activities, but that advisors are also supportive of their student’s academics.

Student Recommendations

While all participants in the current study believed that they had the ability to manage their time, they also believed that there was room for improvement. During the interview, participants were asked. “What would help you to manage your dual roles?” Responses to this question varied among the participants and only one common theme emerged. When asked what might help her to balance her dual roles Rania responded:

What might help me. Well all I can say is just keeping track of time management. Keeping time management up, staying organized, having my school work and my organizational work separate.

Riley reported that he often feels that he runs out of time and that having a better grasp on time management would be beneficial. He stated:

More than 24 hours in a day. I definitely feel like I run out of time a lot. You know its probably my fault I should probably set more time for things. You know planning my time better would be a definite help in my life, but you know its one of those things I lack at sometimes.

When asked about managing her dual roles, Jenna's response focused on not taking on as many responsibilities and being more intentional when scheduling meetings:

I mean probably not taking on as much. I would have more time to do it. But I think I do it pretty well and maybe just more organization. Um setting up times, meeting times differently, currently its like one meeting to the next meeting to the next meeting so spreading them out maybe.

Personal accountability was also discussed. When asked to identify what might help balance his dual roles Anthony stated:

I feel like you can help yourself, honestly like again just being aware that you have dual roles and that you need to snap out of certain things. I mean if you really need an advisors support I'm sure that there are places you could go and stuff like that but at the end of the day you gotta chop that up with yourself.

As mentioned previously when participants were asked what would help them to manage their dual roles, having a better understanding and grasp of time management skills was the only commonality to emerge. Participants realized that the key to balancing their dual roles was their responsibility. However, student affairs professionals, specifically advisors to student organizations are an important source of support for student leaders. Three main ways that student affairs professionals can assist their student leaders in their

leadership positions are: asking questions, encouraging academics, helping students learn how to effectively prioritize and schedule their various responsibilities.

Chapter Summary

Themes found during individual one-on-one interviews concerning definitions of success, motivations for involvement, impacts of involvement, time management and organizational strategies were explored in Chapter IV. Participants in the study believed that their involvement in extracurricular activities was impacting them positively by helping them to learn about themselves, increasing their time management skills, and acquiring transferable skills. However, negative impacts of involvement in extracurricular activities on academic achievement were also reported by participants in the study. Participants reported that sometimes their extracurricular involvement impacted their academic responsibilities negatively, specifically in their ability to turn in assignments on time and to prioritize their competing demands. Common strategies utilized by participants to manage their time and remain organized were using planners, calendars, smart phones and scheduling in specific times for their academic and extracurricular responsibilities. Additionally, participant responses indicated that student affairs professionals can help their students manage their dual roles by asking questions, encouraging academics, and helping their students learn how to effectively prioritize and schedule their responsibilities. Chapter V will provide an analysis of results, a summary of the previous chapters, provide recommendations for student affairs professionals, and suggestions for future researchers who are examining the impact of student involvement on the collegiate experience.

CHAPTER V

Discussion, Recommendations and Conclusion

The current research utilized a qualitative approach to provide insight into how the academic performance of college students was impacted by their involvement in extracurricular activities during their collegiate experience. The purpose of the current study was to examine how students were able to balance extracurricular involvement and their academic coursework at a midsized, Midwest university. For the current study, the researcher chose to interview established student leaders at the research site who were not employed. An established student leader was defined as follows: student leaders who are in their third or fourth year of college and are currently serving on one or more executive boards at the research site during the spring and fall semesters of 2014. During their time in college, student leaders have to balance between their academic responsibilities and their responsibilities to their organizations. In order to gain insight into how current student leaders are balancing the competing demands of their dual roles, the following research questions were asked: (1) How are student leaders balancing their student

involvement and coursework? (2) What strategies are student leaders using to balance their multiple roles and manage the competing demands of their student involvement and academic coursework? and (3) How can student affairs professionals assist student leaders with managing their dual roles? In the following chapter, the results are discussed, recommendations for student affairs professionals are provided, as well as recommendations for future research.

Discussion

In Chapter IV, each of the three research questions were identified and themes were explored through five individual one-on-one interviews conducted for this study. Themes that emerged that did not fall under a specific research question were also identified (i.e. definitions of success and motivations for involvement).

Importance of Student Engagement and Benefits

According to Keeling (2003), traditional students who are involved in extracurricular activities prior to enrollment at an institution of higher education carry this involvement over into their college years. In the current study, 2 participants were involved during their time in high school and stated during their interview that their previous involvement was a contributing factor in their decision to become involved once they arrived at college. Jenna stated that she "...was involved all throughout junior high school so I think being involved is just in my nature." Similarly Rania spoke about her past and how it influenced her decision to get involved. This study supports previous research done by Keeling (2003), which indicates that students who were involved prior to attending college were more likely to continue their involvement in college.

According to Astin (1993), college students are impacted and influenced by their peer groups. Astin believes that this student-to-student interaction has wide reaching impacts in both the academic and leadership development of college students. The influence of peer groups was reported throughout the interviews by all five participants. For Thomas, Rania, and Riley peer groups influenced their decision to get involved in extracurricular activities during their time in college. Participants in the current study noted study habits, time management, and the ability to balance the different aspects of their life were also impacted by their peer groups. During his interview, Anthony reported that his ability to manage time, study, and work on coursework was often impacted negatively by those in his peer group.

While there were some participants that spoke of the negative impacts of their peer groups on their academics Jenna, Riley, Raina and Thomas all utilized their peer groups as a way to manage their stress and provide support in managing their student involvement roles. Riley reported one example of utilizing peer groups to maintain life balance in his interview "...hanging out with my friends. When I'm stressed it definitely helps me keep my head on and not lose my mind just doing homework all day everyday." These responses from participants in the current study support Astin's (1993) research on the influence of peer groups during college and show that this influence is seen in several aspects of a college student's life including motivations for involvement in extracurricular activities and decreased levels of stress and study habits.

Participant responses from the current study support the findings from a study conducted by Fredricks (2012), who found that moderate levels of involvement in extracurricular activities benefitted students positively however, there were negative

impacts when students became over-involved. During his interview, Anthony reported that involvement “does have a huge impact and that is probably the hardest thing that you find yourself doing realizing that you really need to stop. Just stop right now and do your academics.” Anthony also believed that his ability to meet academic deadlines was impacted negatively by his roles in extracurricular activities. While negative impacts of involvement were reported during the one on one interviews, participants in the current study also reported several positive benefits of their involvement in extracurricular activities. This suggests that while participants are positively benefitting from their involvement, there may be a threshold where students are becoming overinvolved, which may negatively impact their academics studies.

Academic Performance and Success

In a study conducted in 2008 by Ani, Toews, Sevin and Purswell, grade point averages and student perceptions of academic success were explored. According to the study, Ani et al. considered students to be academically successful if their grade point average was at least a 2.0. Students in this study however, did not place an emphasis on grade point average and when asked to define academic success, students did not define success through the use of grade point averages. Data from the current study supports results from the Ani et al. (2008) study. When asked to define academic success, only one of the participants in the current study mentioned attaining a specific grade point average, while the rest focused on attending class, being engaged in the classroom, and getting good grades to determine if they were succeeding academically.

Participant responses were also in alignment with a study conducted by Harper in 2005. This study found that college students’ held the belief that the college experience

was more than just grades and being academically successful. According to the data collected in Harper's study, this belief was a contributing factor in students decision to not step down from leadership roles in extracurricular activities even when their academics were impacted negatively. When he arrived at the research site Anthony had a cumulative grade point average of 3.25 and at the time of data collection his cumulative grade point had fallen to a 2.69. In his interview, Anthony revealed that he believed that while the academic side of college is mandatory, it is the skills and connections he was gaining through his extracurricular involvement that were the defining aspects of his collegiate experience.

Recommendations for Student Affairs Professionals

With a focus on having a well-rounded collegiate experience, students are being encouraged to become involved both in and out of the classroom. Students are being encouraged to enrich their collegiate experience by becoming involved. It is important for student affairs professionals to have an understanding of how college students are able to balance their involvement in extracurricular activities with their academic coursework. The current research provides insight into what strategies student leaders are currently utilizing to manage their dual roles. It also provides student affairs professionals with recommendations for how they can help prepare their students to successfully manage the responsibilities of their dual roles.

Participants in the current study were not able to provide a consistent definition for academic success and only one reported grade point average as an important component of being academically successful. With four out of five participants not reporting grade point average as a contributing factor to being academically successful, it may be

important for student affairs professionals to reevaluate how they view academic success or at least to have conversations with their student leaders. Weekly one-on-one meetings between advisors and student leaders provide a platform for student affairs professionals to have conversations about academics with their students. Advisors to student organizations should be scheduling these meetings and asking their students about academics in their weekly one on ones. Individual meetings, help advisors to better understand their students, providing students with support and guidance. These weekly one-on-one meetings can also help encourage the growth and development of students and provide a deeper level of mentoring. With many students, looking to pursue graduate degrees it is important for them to have an understanding of how grade point average is factored into that process and how graduate programs may have different standards for what they consider to be academic success.

Another recommendation for student affairs professionals is to focus on helping student leaders learn and utilize time management and organizational strategies. Participants in the current study discussed the importance of time management strategies. However, only three of them reported actually implementing those strategies into their day-to-day lives. This discrepancy shows a disconnect between understanding the importance of time management and actually utilizing time management strategies. Student affairs professionals should help their students to develop their organizational and time management skills as this will not only help them to be able to balance their dual roles but also help them to succeed after they graduate. One way that student affairs professionals could help their students strengthen their ability to manage time is to

incorporate time management skills into extracurricular organization's trainings and retreats.

Student affairs professionals need to recognize when a student leader is becoming overinvolved and be able to provide guidance for those students. While student affairs professionals want to encourage extracurricular involvement, there is a point where high levels of involvement can begin to have negative impacts on student leaders. If student affairs professionals recognize that a student leader is becoming unable to manage the competing demands of their dual roles it is important to remind the student that they are attending an institution of higher education to attain a degree and to help them reevaluate and prioritize their level of involvement in extracurricular activities.

Recommendations for Future Research

The current study examined established student leaders ability to balance their extracurricular involvement and their academic coursework during their time in college and sought to gain an understanding of what strategies student leaders were utilizing to achieve this balance. The following are recommendations for future research in this area of study:

- The current study interviewed five student leaders at the research site and out of those five; four were affiliated with a Greek letter organization. Future research will need to utilize a more diverse student sample, where the majority of participants are not affiliated with Greek letter organizations. This would help to ensure that the ability to balance their extracurricular and academic roles is not being impacted by their participation in a fraternity or sorority.

- The current study did not utilize participants who were in leadership positions that were paid and received any type of compensation. At the research site, this eliminated student leaders who were involved in new student orientation, the university programming board, student government, and resident assistants. Future research should examine students in these roles, as they are in significant leadership positions as well as paid jobs on a college campus and require a significant amount of time.
- A time study of student leaders could be conducted over the course of a semester which would allow future researchers to see where students self report spending their time and their levels of stress.
- Future researchers examining the dynamic of involvement in extracurricular activities and academics need to consider asking participants to disclose their academic major. The varying level of academic rigor across majors may impact students' ability to manage their academic and extracurricular responsibilities, and should be addressed in future research.

Conclusion

The current study was completed, utilizing a qualitative methodology, in order to gain an understanding of how college students were able to balance their extracurricular involvement and academic coursework during their time in college, as well as to determine specific strategies that college students were utilizing for organization and time management. Chapter V contained a discussion of the results found through the current study. Results from the study showed that while all participants identified positive impacts resulting from their involvement in extracurricular activities, negative impacts of

extracurricular involvement were also reported. Results also showed that all five participants believed that time management was vital to their ability to balance their extracurricular involvement and academic coursework, but only three were currently utilizing time management strategies to balance their dual roles. Recommendations for student affairs professionals were provided to help increase insight into current students' beliefs about academic success and its impact on the collegiate experience and to provide guidance for helping student leaders successfully balance their extracurricular involvement with academic coursework.

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Appendix A

Demographic Survey:

1. What is your age in years?
2. What is your academic class standing?
3. What is your gender?
4. What is your ethnicity?
5. What is your cumulative Grade Point Average (GPA)?
6. Tell me what kind of leader you are?
7. What leadership roles do you hold within the student organizations that you're involved in?
8. What year did you get involved on campus?
9. How many hours a week do you spend on your student involvement roles?
10. What does a normal week look like for you in terms of meetings and time commitments?
11. Tell me about the classes you are taking this semester?
12. On average how many hours a week do you spend working on homework?
13. On average how many hours a week do you spend working on coursework?
14. On average how many hours a week do you spend studying for tests or exams?

15. Have you ever felt overloaded or overwhelmed?

Appendix B

Interview Protocol:

Background information

1. Tell me about yourself
2. What is your definition of being successful?
3. What is your definition of being academically successful?
4. What are your long-term goals?

Questions on Student Involvement

5. Tell me what kind of leader you are?
6. What lead you to become involved on campus?
7. In the context of being a student leader, who are your role models?
8. Tell me about the relationship that you have with your advisors?
9. As a student leader, who do you go to for advice/ support?
10. What impact has being involved had on your time at college?

Questions on Academic Involvement

11. What kind of student do you think you are?

12. In an academic setting, who are your role models?
13. In an academic setting, what is your relationship with your faculty members?

Questions on Time Management and Balancing Strategies

14. How do you feel you manage your time?
15. What strategies do you use to balance your time and commitments?
16. What is your number one tool that you utilize for organization?
17. How important is time management and organization to you as a student and student leader?
18. What do you do to help maintain balance in your life?
19. What percentage of your time do you spend on time for yourself?

Interactions between Involvement and Academics

20. What do you do to manage the different aspects of your life?
21. How do you balance school and being involved?
22. What strategies do you use to balance your school work and extracurricular involvement?
23. Do you use different strategies for your academic role and your extracurricular roles?
24. What role do you think that student involvement has had on your academics if any?
25. Are your advisors supportive of your academics?
26. Are your faculty members supportive of your extra curricular involvement?

27. What might help you manage your dual roles?

28. How often does your student involvement negatively impact your school work?

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

The Balancing Act Between Student Involvement and Academic Coursework

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Rocken Roll and Dena Knies), from the College Student Development Department at Eastern Illinois University.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Please ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether or not to participate.

You have been asked to participate in this study because you are a student leader on campus who is not currently employed.

• PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between student involvement and academic performance.

• PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to:

Fill out a demographic sheet and participate in an interview conducted by the primary researcher about your student involvement and academic coursework.

The interview will be recorded both audio and visual so that the researcher can go back and create a transcript for the interview.

- **POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

This study does not have any potential risks above minimal risk.

- **POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY**

Participants in this study will not directly benefit from this study. However future student leaders may benefit if recommendations are provided from the study

- **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of assigning pseudonyms to the participants. All data collected from this study will be stored in a locked filing cabinet and destroyed in three years following IRB protocol.

The recorded interview will only be accessed by the primary researcher and the faculty advisor. Recordings will be erased after three years following IRB protocol.

- **PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

Participation in this research study is voluntary and not a requirement or a condition for being the recipient of benefits or services from Eastern Illinois University or any other organization sponsoring the research project. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits or services to which you are otherwise entitled.

There is no penalty if you withdraw from the study and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

- **IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS**

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please contact:

Rocken Roll
raroll@eiu.edu
321-403-0373

or

Dr. Dena Kniess
drkniess@eiu.edu
217-581-7240

• **RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS**

If you have any questions or concerns about the treatment of human participants in this study, you may call or write:

Institutional Review Board
Eastern Illinois University
600 Lincoln Ave.
Charleston, IL 61920
Telephone: (217) 581-8576
E-mail: eiuirb@www.eiu.edu

You will be given the opportunity to discuss any questions about your rights as a research subject with a member of the IRB. The IRB is an independent committee composed of members of the University community, as well as lay members of the community not connected with EIU. The IRB has reviewed and approved this study.

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at any time. I have been given a copy of this form.

Printed Name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date

I, the undersigned, have defined and fully explained the investigation to the above subject.

Signature of Investigator

Date