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Speaking to Power: An Exploration of College Students' Experiences with Student Lobbying

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Abstract

The United States is currently experiencing an increase in student activism compared to recent years (Jason, 2018). While research on student activism is vast, there is little research that has examined student activism through student-run lobby groups. Research seems to be non-existent when it comes to exploring the experiences of students involved in student lobbying as a form of activism. Studies also often focus on the outcomes of student activism, rather than the student activists themselves. This qualitative study utilized semi-structured interviews to explore the experiences of students who had been involved in a student-run lobby group at a rural mid-sized state institution in the Midwest. The research showed that the experiences and knowledge gained from a student's experience with a student-run lobby group impacts them greatly as an undergraduate student and citizen.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Political student leaders are making a comeback. According to Jason (2018), the United States is currently undergoing the "most forceful surge of youth activism since the 1960s," (para. 5). Student activism has a domino effect, Sax (2004) found that students tend to become more likely to participate in activism on their college campus if they are surrounded by peers who are motivated by helping others and "influencing the political structure," (p.75). Across the country there have been a number of national school walkouts, marches, die-ins, and other gatherings to bring awareness, take action, and to create change (Jason, 2018). While these forms of student activism are the most popular, there are different ways students can create positive change on their campuses such as getting involved in self-governance organizations or lobbying (Beeler, 1979).

Although research has shown what changes can come from student activism, not much is known about the students creating the change and why they choose to do what they do. Students are sometimes willing to put their schoolwork, involvements, and social life on the backburner in order to participate in a cause that may or may not create the change they want to see (Jason, 2018). One explanation for their involvement is their sense of right and wrong. One such example of someone who based their actions on their moral compass was Martin Luther King Jr. On multiple occasions Martin Luther King Jr. quoted Theodore Parker, an abolitionist minister from the 19th century, "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice" (Jason, 2018, para. 9). College students make moral decisions in the classroom, in their residence halls, and in their extracurricular activities on and off campus (Yanikoski,2004). Understanding a student's

morality can help recognize their reasoning for their involvement in student activism activities. This study aimed to understand political student leaders and why they choose to get involved in student lobbying, a form of student activism, to create change on their college campuses and how their involvement impacts them.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine why students participate in a student lobby group on the campus of a mid-size state institution in the Midwest. In addition to why students choose to engage in this form of involvement, this study also explored the impact student lobbying has on the student's involvement.

Research Questions

This study sought to better understand the reasons behind why students choose to engage politically on their college campuses. The following questions guided this study:

RQ1: Why do students get involved in student lobby groups?

RQ2: How does a student's involvement in a student lobby group impact their perception of civic engagement and politics in general?

RQ3: What are some shared benefits gained by students who are actively engaged in a student lobby group?

RQ4: How does participating in a student lobby group impact a student's overall involvement on campus and in their communities?

Proposition of the Study

Although there is past research and literature regarding political activism on college campuses, research has not focused on the students who participate, and the impact such participation has on them. Therefore, this study sought to discover why

students get involved in political activities and how their involvement impacts the way they view political and governmental processes.

Significance of the Study

The United States is currently experiencing an increase in student activism compared to recent years (Jason, 2018). This study is significant because it will focus on political student leaders and why they choose to be involved in a student-run lobby group, rather than just focusing on their actions and outcomes. The mission statement of the research institution states that the university encourages students to, "become responsible citizens and leaders." (Institution A, n.d., para. 1) throughout their education. In addition, research indicates that one in ten incoming students will get involved in some form of activism during their collegiate experience (Eagan et al., 2015). Eagan et al. (2015) also found that Black students are twice as likely to serve as agents of social change compared to their White peers.

Findings from this study can help administrators and student affairs professionals better understand ways they can work alongside political student leaders on their campuses to create positive and effective change. This is important, because the way institutions respond to political student leaders and their actions can send a message about the institution's structural approach to change, and even their approach to diversity on their campus (Barnhardt, 2014). Students who participate in different forms of activism also benefit from this learning experience. Research shows that students who participate in such activities strengthen critical thinking skills, gain leadership skills, and learn about the importance of democratic participation (Tsui, 2000; Kezar, 2010; Rhoads, Saenz, & Carducci, 2005).

Limitations of the Study

The researcher studied political student leaders and why they choose to get involved in student lobby groups. Although the researcher would have liked to get a diverse population and be able to study students who have had a wide range of activism experience, the research site was a predominantly White, rural, public Midwestern university/institution. This would mean that at best, findings will best be transferable to similar institutions. The topics that students choose to lobby for depends on what students are involved in the group, which can influence the overall experience. The researcher reached out to all students that have been a part of the student lobby group. Another limitation of the study was finding participants. The research site is a mid-sized institution that does not have a reputation for student activism, therefore finding those students and wanting them to be involved in the study was difficult. The number of participants that were still at the institution was also limited due to the on-going global pandemic canceling the last two student lobby days for the student run lobby group.

Definition of Term

The following words have been identified for further clarification.

- **Student-run lobby group:** A group of college students who work collectively to communicate with governmental representatives and try to influence those representatives to vote a certain way on different issuers pertaining to college students and higher education.

- **Political student leader**: A student who possesses leadership qualities and uses their skills to spread knowledge regarding public policy and current political events.

- **Student activism**: Action by students taken collectively toward social change (Broadhurst and Martin, 2014).

- **Trusteeing:** An action by a person who serves as a trustee (Merriam-Webster, 2011). In this research, trusteeing will refer to a student who is serving as an advocate on a Board of Trustees at a university and performing functions as a trustee.

- **Lobbying:** A form of activism that can be done through written or oral communications and serves as an attempt to influence government action. In Illinois, lobbying is defined as any communication between an individual and an elected official of the executive or legislative branch in state government with the objective to influence governmental action (NCSL, 2020).

Chapter II

Review of the Literature

This chapter provides a review of the literature and explains prior research regarding political and civic engagement from college students on college campuses. The following literature review will examine the history of student activism on college campuses, the different forms of activism, the importance of students coming together to be a collective force and reasons why students decide whether to get engaged politically or civically on their college campuses.

History of Student Activism on College Campuses

Historically, higher education has been documented from the administrative and faculty point of view. However, student activism provides researchers with an understanding of this history from a student perspective (Wheatle & Commodore, 2019). This lens can help identify trends in higher education and other issues that are currently happening or that may arise in the future on college campuses (Wheatle & Commodore, 2019).

Prior research on student activism focuses on the Civil Rights era in the 1960s due to the large amounts of protests, sit-ins, and other forms of activism on college campuses (Wheatle & Commodore, 2019). Today, researchers continue to look back almost 60 years ago, as many of the issues students were protesting against are still relevant today (Wheatle & Commodore, 2019). The 1960s brought about large numbers of student activists and carried on into the 1970s, but according to Beeler (1979) this activism was brought on by "pocketbook economics" and academic issues (p. 197). "Pocketbook economics" refers to the cost of college and the fees that college students were paying

(Beeler, 1979). The 1970s also brought new forms of student activism: lobbying, trusteeing, and collective bargaining over contracts for faculty (Beeler, 1979). College students were beginning to see themselves as adults who should have representation on where their money was going and matters concerning their academics (Beeler 1979).

In the mid-1980s, as the movements from the 1960s and 1970s slowed down, educators started to notice that places of higher education were not properly preparing students in civic responsibility (Sax, 2004). Although universities were not prioritizing educating students on civic responsibility, the students in the 1990s were still active in their communities (Hirsch, 1993). Students in the 1990s were more prone to fight for change by working within the system they found problems with, rather than fighting against the system like so many students did between the 1960s and 1980s (Roark, 1992). College students in the 1990s were interested in influencing and creating change within a variety of different social issues, as well as fighting to change the overall political structure (Roark, 1992). Even though the approach to fighting for change looked different over the decades since the 1960s, the students all had the commonality of wanting to create a positive change that benefited everyone (Hirsch, 1993; Roark, 1992).

Throughout the years and history of student activism on college campuses, student activism was commonly viewed as disruptive and served as a distraction from the work of the institution (Chambers & Phelps, 1993, 1994). As a result, student activism was frowned upon and not taken seriously. More recently, there has been research that has found a correlation between students who participate in a form of activism and students' leadership engagement and development throughout their college career (Biddex, 2014; DeAngelo, et al., 2016; Kezar & Maxey, 2014). Therefore, institutions of

higher learning are starting to find value in encouraging students to be politically engaged and incorporating these values in their mission statements (Evans, 1987). Although student activism in the United States can be traced back as far as the 1700s, much has changed since its beginning and institutions can be sure to see more changes and development into the future (Farago et al., 2018).

Forms of Activism

Protesting, signing petitions, and participating in a march or sit-in are all popular forms of student activism (Beeler, 1979). Student activism can also be fighting for representation, being in the room when discussing concerns of students, speaking with legislators themselves and much more. Two important forms of activism that developed in the 1970s were lobbying and trusteeing (Beeler, 1979). Students were beginning to be taken seriously as young adults and they were at the table helping make decisions that affected them and their peers (May, 2010).

Student Government Associations on College Campuses

From the very beginning of higher education in the United States in the 18th century, students craved a sense of empowerment and a channel to discuss the policies and procedures of institutions they did not agree with (May, 2010). Students wanted to be taken seriously regarding their opinions and disagreements with universities, and they had a desire to take on responsibility and be represented. They wanted a voice in the decision-making process of the institution they were a part of, and they wanted that voice to be heard. Therefore, students began to create different forms of student representation and self-governance on college campuses in the 1700s (May, 2010).

From the 1700s until the early 1900s, the culture surrounding higher education had a strict hierarchy between administrators, faculty, and students where students were seen as having very few rights and privileges (May, 2010). Students felt powerless and were unhappy with the lack of control they had over their own lives in the college environment (May, 2010). The feelings of frustration students were collectively feeling could be shown through the way they rebelled in the 18th and 19th century by not only protesting but going as far as even burning buildings and expressing violence toward professors (Jackson, 2000). During this time, students created different self-governance clubs like literary societies, which led to student assemblies, class councils, student councils, and student associations that consisted of an executive branch, legislative branch, and a judicial branch (May, 2010).

After World War II, the traditional student began to look different. Institutions began to have an increasing enrollment of non-traditional students: they were working, both part-time and full-time, and many were commuting and living off-campus (Altbach & Cohen, 1990). Consequentially, students were not as interested in getting involved with self-governance organizations. This attitude that was sweeping college students across the country was mainly due in part to the issues happening outside of the classroom such as the Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam War (Altbach & Cohen, 1998). Also, during this time, students did not see their role in higher education as being respected and felt as though they were not being taken seriously (Miller & Nadler, 2006). Although involvement has been fluid regarding self-governance on college campuses throughout the years since the Civil Rights Movement, these organizations are still important to higher education in the United States.

Today, student government associations on college campuses still have all three branches: executive, legislative, and judicial. Although the structure resembles the federal government, there are different rules that college student government associations abide by through their personal constitutions and by-laws (Smith, et al., 2016). Most organizations follow Robert's Rules of Order and have some system of formality in their operations. Robert's Rules of Order was written to create a more formal procedure on how to run meetings (Robert, 1915). It included rules, procedures, and customs on how to properly govern a meeting in order to not stray from the tasks at hand (Robert, 1915).

Another requirement of most student government associations on college campuses is that the executive branch and legislative branch must apply for the position and be elected by their peers through a student body election (Smith, et al., 2016). Collegiate student government associations may also have an individual on their executive branch that is typically elected and serves as the student trustee on the institution's board of trustees (Beeler, 1979). This shows the importance of governance and the role of student government associations as the student trustee typically has full voting power on the board and serves as the representation for the student body (Beeler, 1979). Student government associations are a form of student activism by giving students representation and a voice on campus.

Student-Run Lobby Groups on College Campuses

Another form of student activism that has become a growing trend since the 1970s is student lobbying (Beeler, 1979). Student lobbying gives students a chance to advocate for themselves and do this directly by emailing, calling, or visiting with legislators (Horny & Seale, 2019). Not only does this give students a chance to advocate

for themselves, this also allows them to learn more about public policy and local, state, and federal government (Lipka, 2017; Marklein, 2013). While most students are required to take a course in high school regarding civics and government, many find the process of public policy and the workings of government to be confusing (Stanberry & Blackwell, 1997). Therefore, students who participate in a student-run lobbying group increase their knowledge on public policies that are affecting them and learn more about the legislative process.

Impact of Student Activists: Power in Numbers

Lipka (2017) and Marklein (2013) conducted a study on the lobbying efforts by students and their success when working collectively toward a common goal. It was found that the larger the group of students, the more successful they were in spreading the message about their cause and creating the change they sought (Lipka, 2017). Students are also more likely to participate in activism on their college campus if they are surrounded by peers who are motivated by helping others and creating positive and effective change (Sax, 2004). Pressure from student activists on college campuses can help lead to administrators taking issues students find important seriously (Marklein, 2013).

For example, colleges and universities recently began to take sexual assault accusations more seriously because student activists that took a stand and demanded change (Marklein, 2013). When students, faculty and the community come together for a united cause, it becomes easier to demand change from administrators on college campuses (Marklein, 2013). The push to do something about sexual assault on college campuses by students led to multiple organizations and campaigns to form, which

ultimately created a national movement (Marklein, 2013). This organization of college

students shows that there is power within a group dynamic and students are stronger

when they work collectively to accomplish a task. This also applies to students who

travel in large numbers to lobby government representatives (Hartley, 1980).

Importance of Civic Engagement in College

Experiencing civic engagement in college can have lasting benefits on students

once they go into their future careers. People are surrounded by politics, but they often do

not realize it until something affects them, and then they are forced to understand that

truth (Farago, et al., 2018). When students become working adults after college in their

selected fields, they might encounter politics and governmental committees that deal with

laws and programs in their career fields. Therefore, one might see a group of nurses

carrying out a lobby day at the state capitol building, or a nonprofit that works with

homelessness in the city participating in a sit-in outside the doors of a committee hearing

room or the floor chambers during voting. It is therefore important that college students

learn how to be civically engaged to prepare them for outside the realm of college

(Hooks, 1994).

Through student activism, students can learn how to be an effective leader and

communicator, as well as learn the importance of engagement and involvement in the

community they live (Farago, et al., 2018). When looking at college student

development, it is imperative to look at the whole student. Some argue that student

activism is a form of holistic learning that will benefit students once they graduate

college and become active citizens in their perspective communities (Hooks, 1994). Not

only is it important for the student to learn these skills, but it is essential for institutions of

higher learning to provide such opportunities. According to Barnhardt, Sheets, and Pasquesi (2015), students who discuss openly with peers regarding social justice issues have an increase in their civic skills, their connection to the community, and are more inspired to work toward creating positive, meaningful change. This is important for universities to note because students seek a sense of belonging to find a reason to continue where they are (Strange & Banning, 2015).

Stanberry and Blackwell (1997) focused on family and consumer science students in Mississippi and the importance of preparing those students for civic and political involvement. This involvement is not important just for family and consumer science students, but all students (Stanberry & Blackwell, 1997). There are a variety of careers that rely on their professionals to be involved in the public policy process to help participate in positive change for that specific field. Lawmakers cannot be experts on all things that come across their desk, but with the help from students and professionals, legislators can better understand specific practices that involve real people (Stanberry & Blackwell, 1997). Lawmakers are more inclined to listen to different viewpoints and ideas when people, especially students, interact with them face-to-face (Drollette, 2011). Therefore, learning how public policy works and how to communicate with lawmakers at the collegiate level is important. Learning how to research different pieces of legislation also allows students to acquire more about how public policies work and how a bill becomes a law (Stanberry & Blackwell, 1997). It can be an intimidating and complicated process for young adults and college students to understand, but nonetheless is significant.

Student Motivation for Civic Engagement

Students want to be involved, but do not know the steps to do so and lack the confidence in their ability to bring about change (Kiesa, et al., 2007). Kiesa, et al. (2007) suggested that colleges and universities should provide more opportunities for students to be civically engaged. In the 21st century, educators have noticed college students using volunteer opportunities on campus and in the community to bring about the change they want to see (Kiesa, et al., 2007). Frawley and Bigby (2015) found that college students who advocate on behalf of themselves and others seek three things: a sense of belonging, a chance to make social connections, and to make a positive change. Change can be viewed in many ways. For example, Kiesa, et al. (2007) explained that students typically view change in two main ways: the desire to impact systematic change at a deeper level and to address immediate change in the community.

Students want to feel confident in their abilities when going about making change, but sometimes they do not feel informed enough on current events and on how the legislative process works (Kiesa, et al., 2007). Therefore, lobbying and giving students a chance to speak with their legislators and lawmakers is important at the collegiate level. In 2011, a group of student nurses prepared research on specific topics and went to Washington D.C. to advocate for health policy, but also to learn how the legislative process works (Drollette, 2011). The experiences these nurses gained showed that lobbying was effective and speaking face-to-face with lawmakers leaves a lasting impact (Drollette, 2011). During this trip, student nurses were able to learn about health policy, the legislative process, and most importantly, they learned about civic responsibility (Drollette, 2011).

Students who lack this kind of experience feel intimidated by political involvement because it can be complicated, they do not feel informed and because they don't see lawmakers as people who will listen to them (Kiesa, et al., 2007). Kiesa, et al. found though they may feel intimidated, college students want to have an open discussion on major issues if everyone is heard, and they collectively decide what should be done. This finding led to the idea of morality in relation to student activists on college campuses.

Moral Development

Moral development can be studied and measured from a variety of different approaches. First, one must answer the question of what morality is and how does one measure an individual's moral development. Gert and Gert (2017) argue that the reason morality cannot have a singular definition is because the term is used and measured in two different senses: a descriptive sense and normative sense. Gert and Gert (2017) explain further that the descriptive sense refers to the set of rules put forth by society or a certain group of people, whereas the normative sense refers to the rights and wrongs that are understood by all rational people.

This information provides a foundation of how morality can be understood and the different moral development theories. These two definitions are used in the theories of Jean Piaget, Lawrence Kohlberg, and Carol Gilligan. Piaget (1932) and Kohlberg (1971) used the descriptive sense and measured a person's morality by observing their decisions based on their understanding of right versus wrong and rules. In contrast, Gilligan (1982) used the normative sense and created and used the ethics of care approach. This can best be observed through Gilligan's (1982) study of women facing the

decision of having an abortion.

Moral Development and College Students

Measuring an individual's moral development is not limited to just their collegiate years, however, the collegiate years are formative. College students are constantly faced with different moral decisions that affect them, those around them, and sometimes the institution itself. These moral decisions that college students face can be found within the classroom setting, in their residence halls, and in their extracurricular activities on and off campus (Yanikoski, 2004). Student leaders have been shown to have more experience with moral decision making than their non-leadership peers (Miles, 2011). Universities and Colleges are also understanding the importance of students developing morals and values for them to be developed citizens in society after they graduate. Consequently, institutions of higher learning are including moral development in their mission statements and overall educational goals for their students (Evans, 1987).

One moral issue that students face is the decision to be civically engaged. Sunil and Verma (2018) conducted a study that explored the moral identity of young adults and its role in their level of civic engagement. They found that a student's moral identity predicted their level of civic engagement (Sunil & Verma, 2018). For example, a student who has a high moral identity may experience more motivation to be civically engaged. Whether a student's moral identity is internalized or symbolized determines their reasoning for this motivation (Sunil & Verma, 2018). For instance, if a student has a high moral identity that is internalized, the simple act of being civically engaged is enough to satisfy them. Whereas a student who has a high moral identity that is symbolized may

seek appraisal for their actions and behaviors. This behavior also depends heavily on the opportunities available to those students who seek them (Sunil & Verma, 2018).

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

Two different theories will provide the framework for this study. Specifically, Lawrence Kohlberg's (1971) theory of moral development and Carol Gilligan's (1982) care-based moral development theory. Although Kohlberg and Gilligan have different beliefs on what guides people's moral compass, both theories will be used in this research. This section explains these theories and their importance to college student development.

Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development

Kohlberg agreed with the ideas from Jean Piaget's (1932) theory of moral development, which specifically looked at children to study their moral reasoning and proposed that children had two main types of moral thinking: heteronomous morality (moral realism) and autonomous morality (moral relativism) (Piaget, 1932). Kohlberg expanded Piaget's original two stages and developed a six-stage model gathered in three different levels to explain how one develops moral reasoning (Kohlberg, 1971). Each level has two stages and represents the correlation between an individual and society's expectations. Level one is *pre-conventional,* and is where people are individually focused (Kohlberg, 1971). They do not yet understand the expectations from society and are concrete thinkers. Level two, or the *conventional* level, is where individuals respect authority and the rules of society (Kohlberg, 1971). The final level (level three) is the *post-conventional* level and, according to Kohlberg (as cited in Patton, Renn, Guido &

Quaye, 2016), it is where individuals use their "self-chosen principles" to guide their decisions, rather than rely on the expectations of others.

The *pre-conventional* level is further divided into heteronomous morality and individualistic, instrumental morality (Kohlberg, 1971). In the heteronomous morality stage, individuals learn that whatever leads to punishment is wrong and they obey the rules only because they do not want to be penalized (Kohlberg, 1971). The individualistic, instrumental morality stage is where they learn that the right way to behave is the way that is rewarded. Overall, the pre-conventional stage is where one learns between right and wrong based on reward and punishment (Kohlberg, 1971).

The *conventional* level includes stages three (interpersonally normative morality) and four (social system morality). One begins to show good behavior due to the influences of those they are close to in stage three (Kohlberg, 1971). Stage four is a step above this and describes when individuals begin to be influenced by those outside their inner circle and begin to strive to meet societal norms and expectations (Kohlberg, 1971).

Finally, stages five and six make up the post-conventional level. Stage five is the human rights and social welfare morality and is where one begins to try and balance legality and morality (Kohlberg, 1971). Individuals question whether the law is doing what it can for all humans. Stage six, the morality of universalizable, reversible, and prescriptive general ethical principle, is the final stage (Kohlberg, 1971). In this stage, the person values fairness and wants to grasp the opinions of all involved in the situation because that is what they believe is right.

When looking at moral development within individuals, Kohlberg focused on looking at the process of how one came to make moral judgements (as cited in Patton et

al., 2016). In this search, he found that it is based on an individual's understanding of rights and rules. Kohlberg's theory was based on his study where he examined all White, adolescent boys and later applied his findings to college students regardless of race or gender.

Gilligan's Women's Moral Development

Gilligan worked alongside Kohlberg while he developed his stages of moral development and while assisting him, she observed a lack of women in his sample and believed that as a result, his findings were skewed. Therefore, Gilligan sought to study women and morality and presented her three different studies in her book, *In a Different Voice* (Gilligan, 1982). Gilligan (1982) found that women were guided by care and responsibility when making moral decisions. Although she found this difference by studying only women, Gilligan concluded that there were two voices and they were not separated by gender, but by themes: ethics of justice and ethics of care (Gilligan, 1982). Walker (2006) found in his critique of Gilligan that although it was found that there was little difference between genders, Gilligan did make a breakthrough in moral development theory by bringing attention to the ethic of care.

In Gillian's (1982) theory of moral development, when looking at women who were faced with the decision whether to get an abortion, she found that there are three levels between selfishness and responsibility with transitions between each one (Gilligan, 1982). The first level is orientation to individual survival, and this is where the individual is unable to distinguish between necessity and survival (Gilligan, 1982). The individual puts themselves first and does what is best for them. Between level one and level two is the first transition, selfishness to responsibility (Gilligan, 1982). In this transition, the

individual begins think and feel responsible for others. When one reaches level two, goodness as self-sacrifice, they begin to put others first in order to be viewed as a good person and to be accepted by society (Gilligan, 1982). From goodness to truth is the second transition and this is where individuals start to question why they are putting others' needs before their own (Gilligan, 1982). They find a balance between caring about themselves and caring about others. The final level, the morality of nonviolence, is where an individual reaches the most sophisticated form of reasoning (Gilligan, 1982). In this level, individuals master the balance of caring for self and x.

According to Sunil and Verma (2018), a student's moral identity can predict their level of civic engagement. By utilizing both Kohlberg and Gilligan's theories, the researcher will be able to better understand why students chose to get involved in a student lobby group and whether that experience leads them to continue to be civically engaged. These theories can also provide more information on the motivation behind students' involvement.

Summary

A review of the literature has shown the importance of not only student activism on college campuses, but student activists who serve as agents of change. As seen in the research throughout the literature review, students can benefit greatly when they participate in a form of student activism. Students are not the only winners though. Universities put an emphasis on their sense of community, their integrity as an institution and their commitment to excellence for their students (Barnhardt & Reyes, 2016). These commitments are provided by political student leaders and the different forms of student

activism they are involved in (Barnhardt & Reyes, 2016). Therefore, when institutions and political student leaders work together, positive outcomes can occur.

As we observed throughout the literature review, the movements of the 1960s are often the focus point when studying student activism (Barnhardt & Reyes, 2016). However, when looking at student activism from the 1960s to the 21st century, forms of activism have changed over time, but educators found that many of the issues college students protested against and for, are still relevant on today's college campuses (Farago, et al., 2018). After looking at the history and the importance of large student groups, this chapter also discussed motivation to get involved and its relationship with a student's moral identity. This study seeks understand the motivation and reason for why students choose to be involved in a student-run lobby group and how it affects them.

Chapter III

Methods

This chapter provides a detailed description of the methodological framework that was used in this study examining the motivation behind why students join student-run lobby groups and how this experience affects them. It includes how the study was designed, the description of the participants and research site, and the procedures for data collection and analysis.

Design of the Study

This study used a qualitative approach to gather data. According to Krefting (1991), qualitative research has numerous approaches that include biographical, phenomenology, grounded theory, case study, ethnography, and historical research. This study utilized a phenomenological approach. Through a phenomenological study, researchers can better understand the lived experiences of several individuals by identifying common themes among their perceptions (Creswell, 2007; Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012). The method was chosen to provide a better understanding of why the participants chose to be a part of a student-run lobbying group and how it affected them. Therefore, the participants were former members of the student lobbying group that is located at the research site.

Sample

The sample includes 5 students that have previously been involved members of the campus' student lobbying group. Student participants were contacted by snowball sampling through suggestions from current and former leaders of the student-run lobby group. Snowball sampling is a purposeful strategy in qualitative research where the

researcher asks participants to recommend other potential participants (Creswell, 2007).

This form of sampling was the most efficient in this research because the researcher did

not know all the students that have been involved in the student lobby group over the last

couple of years. A diverse sample of participants were sought. The researcher focused on

these students to better understand their experience of being a part of the student lobby

group.

Research Site

The study took place at a midsized four-year state institution located in a rural

community in the Midwest. The population of the community is approximately 20,000.

According to the University Planning and Institutional Report, the total enrollment of

students in Fall 2018 was approximately 7,600 (Institution A, n.d.) with 59% female and

41% male students. This institution was chosen both for convenience and the fact that the

institution has an active student lobby group that meets throughout both the fall and

spring semesters. This group also attends a lobby day at the state capital once a semester

to speak with local legislators.

Instrument

Researcher

In qualitative research, the researcher is the key facilitator of the study and serves

as the most important instrument (Poggenpoel & Myburgh, 2003). Therefore, the

researcher must recognize their own values, assumptions, experiences, and biases as the

researcher. The researcher has had experience being a part of a student lobby group and

working alongside these groups when working for the state senate (2017-2019). In

addition, they have a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science and a strong interest for

anything related to government and politics. They were also heavily involved in their institution's student government association, which helped run the student lobby group on campus.

This research was conducted to gain more knowledge on the impact participation in student lobby groups has on those involved and what that impact looks like. From the researcher's involvement in a student lobby group during their undergraduate experience, they found a passion for public policy and a thirst to learn more about the governmental process. Knowing that this experience cannot be compared to each unique individual that is a part of a student lobbying group, they wanted to learn about others' experiences. When collecting and coding data, the researcher made a conscious effort to not make assumptions. They did this by being cognizant of their biases and when necessary, asking the participants to elaborate or clarify. By identifying what these students gained and how they were impacted, this study provided valuable recommendations to student affairs professionals who work with student lobbying.

Semi-Structured Interview

The study was conducted using a semi-structured interview that consisted of a series of open-ended questions that captured the experiences and perceptions of the participants regarding their involvement with the student lobby group. This instrument was the most valid and reliable for this study because it allowed for the participants to go into more depth about their experience. The interview was recorded on Microsoft Teams, which helped with overall accuracy. The interviews consisted of the questions in the Interview Protocol (See Appendix D).

Data Collection

The data for this study was collected using semi-structured interviews. Members

of the student lobby group on campus were emailed by the researcher (Appendix B)

through email addresses provided by the current student leader of the group and their

advisor. Those willing to be participants were asked to complete a demographic

information card (see Appendix C). All interviews were recorded with permission from

participants and lasted between 20-60 minutes. Participants were asked to complete an

informed consent form that informed them of the confidentiality measures that were

taken, informed them of the ability to withdraw at any point without repercussions, and

indicated their intention to continue as a participant (see Appendix A).

Treatment of Data

The data collected is being kept on a password protected flash drive to protect the

research and participants. The flash drive is being kept in a locked and secure location.

All the participants were assigned a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality. Per IRB policy,

all data collected will be kept for three years after the completion of this research and

afterward destroyed.

Data Analysis

After each completed discussion, the interview was transcribed. Since this

research used a qualitative approach, the data was analyzed through the coding process.

According to Saldaña (2013), "a theme is an outcome of coding, categorization, or

analytic reflection, not something that is, in itself, coded." (p.14). Therefore, while

reviewing the data prior to the coding process and during the formal coding process,

notes were taken of any themes that came up in an analytic memo. Microsoft Word and

Excel were utilized to code and organize the common themes after transcriptions were completed and read thoroughly.

Summary

      This chapter discussed the methodology that was used in this research by highlighting the selection of participants, the research site, and how the researcher collected and will treat the data. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data from participants during individual interviews of approximately 20-60 minutes. Findings were analyzed using thematic coding to identify common themes and meaning to answer the research questions. Chapter IV will detail the findings from the interviews with the participants for the study.

Chapter IV

Results

This chapter will focus on summarizing the five semi-structured interviews conducted and reporting the themes found to understand the experiences of students involved in a student lobby group. Themes were discovered from analyzing the five interviews and are organized based on the research questions.

Research Question #1: Why do students get involved in student lobby groups?

Two major themes emerged as to why students got involved in the student lobby group. The themes were having a prior interest in how government worked and politics in general and an interest that stemmed from their involvement with the student government on campus.

Prior Interests

Three out of the five participants explained that they had prior interests in how the government works and an overall interest in politics. Kassidy spoke about how her interest in government started in middle school with help from her mom.

> My mom is a middle school history teacher and use to take middle schoolers for the day to Springfield before she retired. They get to follow her around and see the legislators and lobbyists. So, I learned about it then. I also got to see my mom take students as I got older and I thought that was great. She even took students to D.C. and all that stuff.

Kassidy went on to explain how this experience made her thirsty to learn more about government, but also how to be more civically engaged in her community. She explained that she also considered how important it is for students' voices to be heard.

Carly also talked about her prior interest in government and politics. Carly began her collegiate career as a biology major and got involved in student government and the student lobby group because of her passion to learn more. When asked about why she decided to get involved with the student lobby group she said:

I just was like, I'm really not sure what it is but I knew I liked politics, so it seemed like a good opportunity. I didn't really know much about what it entailed until I heard from other students about their experience and what it was like. Once they talked about their experience, I decided to give it a chance.

Carly went on to explain how her involvement in student government and the student action team helped her realize that she did not really want to continue with her biology degree, "I ended up switching my major to political science a couple of months after my first lobby day,".

Max was a political science major and had a pretty good idea of what student lobbying entailed before he got involved on campus. He explained how he had always had an interest in politics from a young age and knew that he would be involved in student government or some kind of political group when he transferred from his community college.

As a poli-sci major I thought I had a good idea of what student lobbying entailed. Who wouldn't want the opportunity to go talk to legislators and your representatives when you are a poli-sci buff? This is the kind of stuff we learn about in class. Rarely do students, or any ordinary person in society, get to set up meetings and talk to their Representative professionally. There is a difference

between writing or calling them and going to Springfield and speaking with them face to face.

These three participants talked about how their prior interests impacted their decision to be a part of the student lobby group. Whether it be their interest in government or their interest in politics, the participants all noted these factors as being significant influences on why they chose to be involved in the student lobby group. They also mentioned their involvement with student government being another influencing factor and how they learned about the opportunities available through the student lobby group. The other two participants did not have a prior interest but were involved with the student government association where they learned about the student lobby group and became interested in learning more and being involved in the program.

Student Government Involvement

All five participants shared during their interviews that they were involved with student government and how that involvement influenced their decision to participate in the student lobby group. All the participants explained that they learned about the student lobby group through older members of student government and from announcements about the program. Xavier talked about how he learned about the student lobby group at only his second student government meeting his freshman year.

> I just joined student government in the Spring semester, and I think it was my second meeting when the Executive Vice President of student government brought it up. I thought it would be cool to see how things actually work in Springfield and I saw it as a learning experience, especially since I didn't know what to expect. You always see the articles in the paper or hear about news

stories, but I was interested in seeing the nitty gritty, like this is what happens on the day to day. So, I thought, why not?

Kassidy had also learned about the student lobby group through her involvement with student government and she saw it as a great opportunity for her voice, as a student, to be heard.

> I remember the Executive Vice President talking about the student lobby group during a student government meeting and after talking to him about it more and understanding what to expect, I thought it would be a good opportunity. I also thought it would be good for legislators and representatives to hear what we had to say since they often hear from higher ups and other colleagues, but rarely get a chance to hear from actual students living on campus, attending classes on campus, and everything.

> Carly learned about the student lobby group as a result of her being a senator in student government.

> Our Executive Vice President at the time, and the Vice President of Student Affairs in student government, both kind of touched on it [the student lobby group] and just talked a lot about it and it sounded interesting. I thought, I might as well give it a try.

Unlike Kassidy, Carly was nervous about being a part of the student lobby group and going to Springfield.

> I kind of assumed I would let the older people take charge and talk and I would just sit there. I was a freshman, and I was nervous. I thought no one would want to hear from me, someone who didn't know as much.

Eddie was a freshman history major and did not have much interest in politics but wanted to get involved on campus and happened to find himself as a senator in student government. After learning about the student lobby group from a student government meeting, Eddie got excited to specifically learn more about how decisions are made regarding Higher Education and K-12.

I thought it was important to understand the decisions in Higher Education at the state level. I thought that was something big to be informed about. I wanted to see how it looked when universities made decisions and when legislators made decisions about education. I also thought it would be cool to learn about funding and how different streams of revenue come to schools and you know, simply just advocate for my school.

Although Eddie did not have a prior interest in politics before his involvement, he was interested to learn more about it and because of this, he signed up to be a part of the student lobby group. After attending the student lobby day and sitting in on committee meetings where education was discussed, he learned that he enjoyed it, "I always liked going to watch the committee meetings because I liked listening to expert testimonies regarding decisions being made in education."

Max is a political science major who transferred from a community college. He wanted to get involved more on campus, since he did not get the chance to do so at his community college. After being involved with student government, he explained how he first heard about the student lobby group.

First time I heard about it was in one of the student government meetings. The Executive Vice President was still looking for people interested and approached

me after the meeting to talk more about it. He said he thought I might be

interested and the way he framed it sounded interesting. Being able to talk to

representatives sounded cool.

Max also went on to discuss that he was excited to go to Springfield and give a different

perspective to representatives than they normally receive.

Overall, all five participants described how being involved formally in student

government had a direct impact on their decision to be involved in the student lobby

group. They talked about learning about the student lobby group through student

government, usually through a specific student government executive officer, or by

listening about the experiences of those who went in the past intrigued them to get

involved. However, they found out about the group, their position with student

government was a major factor in them deciding to sign up.

Research Question #2: How does a student's involvement in a student lobby group

impact their perception of civic engagement and politics in general?

When looking at how students' perceptions were impacted by their involvement

with a student lobby group, two prominent themes appeared. The first theme was

correlated to their perception of legislators and political leaders as being relatable to them

personally. The second theme was a recognition of the importance of being involved and

making their voice, the voice of the student, heard by those in power.

Perception of Legislators and Political Leaders

Three of the participants touched on how their involvement with the student lobby

group changed their perception of state legislators and political leaders. Xavier talked

about his perception prior to his involvement in the student lobby group and how he

viewed people in these roles as being on a pedestal. Xavier compared legislators and politicians to athletes in the way he had viewed them and used the term, "superhuman,". He also talked about how his experience changed that perception. "Being in the actual place where they work, watching what they do, you realize it's just people doing their thing." Xavier went on to describe how it was not about aligning with the values of a particular representative that mattered,

> Regardless of what party they are, if you agree or disagree with them, you get that opportunity to realize these are people trying to do their best at what they're doing. Obviously, they all have different ways going about that, and they're pushing for different things, but it just kind of brought us back down to Earth to kind of see them as normal people. I think that was kind of the biggest take away from my experience.

Like Xavier, Carly saw legislators in a similar light. Carly talked about being nervous to talk to legislators when she participated in the student lobby group as a freshman. She was a Biology major and did not think they would care about what she had to say or value her input. "The legislators were surprisingly engaging. They were super interested in all of us and what we had to say. They seemed to actually care what this little Bio major had to say and were actually super awesome about it." Carly also explained how it was interesting to see her State Senator at the capitol in a different environment because he is from her hometown and she has seen him around her community. "I would run into him at the grocery store and ask how he was and invite him to student government meetings," She said her experience put things in a different perspective and she now saw these legislators as real humans with families and lives outside of their jobs.

Similarly, Eddie had also seen his local legislators around his community. After talking to his local legislators, he found it interesting how many connections he could make with them.

"My favorite part was the connections you can find with your state legislators." He was surprised when he realized "After talking to him I learned that I went to high school with one of his daughters." Eddie went on to reflect on the connections that his campus had to the state government, "I also thought it was cool how many state legislators we met that had connections to our university and how many alumni were around the capitol." He talked about being able to meet legislators that were passionate about being alumni and how a State Senator recognized the student lobby group on the House floor.

Importance of Involvement

The importance of being involved and making your voice heard was emphasized by two of the participants. Kassidy was very passionate about this topic and had participated in the student lobby group multiple times. She said that she realized how her voice mattered after her first experience, especially when representing the university. She said, "It really showed how important it is for students to voice their opinions because we are the ones who are truly representing the university". Kassidy also talked about how it is important for students' voices to be heard, especially when discussing matters that have to do with the university.

> I think it's important for students' voices to matter just as much as anybody else in the world. So, I thought that going as a student, it would be important that they get to see our perspective because yes, they hear from colleagues or higher ups,

but it was important for us as students to come in and just show how important

our voices are because the decisions that are made really affect us.

Eddie is currently student teaching and is pursuing a career as a high school

history teacher. He discussed how important it was for him to learn more about how

decisions are made in education, especially at the K-12 level since he would be working

in that field soon.

I wanted to get more informed about decisions in higher ed at the state level. That

was a big thing for me to learn more about. How it looks when universities are

making decisions about major projects, how they get help from legislators and the

state. Or even how different streams of revenue come to the school and other

different funding mechanisms. I also thought it would be interesting to learn how

the school advocates for different things.

Eddie also talked about how important it was to use his time wisely during his

involvement with the student lobby group. He talked about how during his visit at the

state capitol, he took time to sit in on a couple committee meetings, one being a higher

education committee meeting. By attending these committee meetings, Eddie learned the

importance of staying informed and involved in the things around him.

Research Question #3: What are some shared benefits gained by students who are

actively engaged in a student lobby group?

When asked to identify the benefits they gained from their involvement in the

student lobby group, all the participants talked about gaining something valuable. Four

major themes around these perceived benefits were discovered from the participants'

interviews. These themes were being able to see the "bigger picture", being able to see

the value of voting, being able to picture themselves working in government and politics in the future, and an increase in overall confidence.

Seeing the Bigger Picture

A gained benefit from being involved in the student run lobby group was the ability to see what Xavier described as "the bigger picture." Xavier gave credit to the student lobby group for opening his eyes to the "bigger picture." He explained that from his experience and involvement with the student lobby group, he can understand how and why things happen within local and state government. After not only going as a member, but also being able to lead the student lobby group his senior year, the experience has given him a much broader perspective. "[I] learned a lot about what goes into the different decisions you see, like things don't just happen to happen, a lot goes on behind the scenes." He also explained how this helps him keep a clearer head when reading different articles that might be politically biased. Instead of just reading an article and rolling his eyes, he is more likely to look more into the subject to see what happened to lead to the decision.

> If our state goes from a flat tax to a progressive tax, four years ago I might see that and just think, "that's that" but now I know that there is much more that goes into these decisions. Being involved in the student lobby group pushed me into the realm of learning more about how a decision is made, whether I agree with it or not.

Due to his experience, Xavier feels that he can understand the steps that legislators take to get to the decisions that are made. He also felt as though this knowledge helped him to be less politically polarized.

When Eddie got involved with the student lobby group, he was excited to learn more about what others might view as the "boring stuff". Eddie was excited to learn and know more about the "reasons behind things". He talked about his excitement to read the different bills that were going through the state house and senate chambers because it gave him a better understanding of how the government works and why different outcomes present themselves. Eddie explained that although it is important to pass your state constitution test in high school and know the "basics", it is just as important to dive deeper into learning more about your state legislature.

> It's important to know more about how the state capitol works, and I mean the different committees and subcommittees and hearings. The entire process everything has to go through. Not every state is the same. How they elect officials verse appointed officials. There is just a lot that goes into it and it's important to know and understand.

According to Eddie, being able to understand the governmental process is beneficial because everyone is affected by the decisions that are being drafted and made into bills. Being able to have a deeper understanding of the bigger picture allows students to not only understand how things happen, but why they happen.

Importance of Voting

Although all five participants vocalized the importance of voting, three of them specifically emphasized how their involvement in the student lobby group increased their value on the issue of voting. Eddie had an interesting perspective on why he thinks voting is important. He shared that he thinks it holds legislators more accountable when people vote, especially if it is a close political race. Eddie also thinks it holds them accountable

when you speak with your legislator because you can express that you did vote and that your voice matters, "Look, I'm a voter now, so now you kind of have to listen to what I'm saying at least a little bit right? Or hear me out?"

After being involved with the student lobby group, Kassidy became passionate about voting and getting others to register to vote and exercise that right. Kassidy said she wanted to take what she learned and be more involved on campus, so she chose to help register students to vote, "One thing I took from being involved was that there is more you can do locally." She helped organize and plan a weeklong voter registration drive on campus and then extended that planning by doing it once a month, so students had plenty of opportunities to register.

> From my experience, I realized that everybody's vote mattered and so it was important for me to register people. And it was kind of crazy to see how many college students don't vote or are not registered. So yeah, the student lobby group encouraged me to do more things that helped on a smaller scale.

Kassidy gained an interest in helping others register to vote after seeing how important it was to vote. She explained that our voices are so important that we elect individuals to make decisions for not only us, but for the betterment of our society. That is why she took it upon herself to plan these voter registration drives on campus, because she saw how many of her peers did not exercise that right.

Max touched on how his experience with the student lobby group got him involved with helping Kassidy with the voter registration drives on campus. He talked about how, after being involved with the student lobby group, he was asked to help with the monthly voter registration drives and how that helped him become passionate about

getting students registered to vote. "I care about registering people to vote because if they aren't political science majors or if they don't care about this kind of stuff, they might not even know how to register to vote." Max also talked about how his passion to register people to vote and his experience with the student lobby group lead him to run for an executive office position in student government.

Future Aspirations in Government/Politics

Max expressed an interest in working at the state capitol in some capacity. He plans on getting his master's in public administration and public policy which he believed would assist him in landing a job in government. When talking about his experience on the student lobby group and visiting the state capitol, Max said, "Every time I come here (state capitol), I'm like, yeah, I could see myself working here." Although he is not particularly interested in running for an office, he is interested in working at the state capitol whether he gets into lobbying as a profession or working on a policy team analyzing bills that go through the different chambers.

Carly also talked about how her involvement with the student lobby group inspired her to get more involved in politics and gave her the dream of one day running for office. "The student lobby group definitely inspired me to keep getting involved in politics and running for office someday." She switched her major from Biology to Political Science after being involved with the student lobby group. "I would like to run for office one day. Probably not a super big office, probably more of a local or statewide office, but I'm definitely interested in it." After changing her major, Carly is now working towards getting her MBA before going to law school. "And now with my

business experience, I have a lot more budget knowledge which will be beneficial for when I run for office."

Carly also had an interesting perspective regarding her current path in life and how it aligns with what she wants to do in the future. She reflected on no longer being in political science as a graduate student. "I'm not studying politics, but I have this passion on the side and it's not my main focus right now and that is OK." Her decision to pursue her MBA was to allow a greater depth of learning which she hoped to apply later in life.

> I feel like if anything I'm learning more about how to be a better legislator by learning a diverse set of knowledge. I learned a ton as a political science major, but like now even in my business classes, they pair perfectly for running for office. I feel like I am learning so many things that I can apply if I decide to run.

Carly also talked about how she does not plan on living out her dream of one day running for office anytime soon. She wants to finish her MBA, get her law degree, and "enjoy life a little" before she takes that path one day.

Confidence

Kassidy, who had participated in the student lobby group two years in a row and was planning to lead the group the following year before COVID-19, talked about how her involvement with the lobby group helped her gain confidence.

> You are going to come across uncomfortable situations, and sometimes it's OK to just speak confidently and just be confident in what you're talking about. And I think that was one thing that I really learned during my involvement with the student lobby group. I think that's one thing I'll be able to do no matter where I am. Is just speak confidently and advocate for what I'm really passionate about.

Kassidy shared that it was important for her to share this because without her involvement with the student lobby group, she might not have found this confidence deep within herself. Kassidy also talked about how she tries to share this piece of advice with others because it has helped her be successful within the student lobby group and in other areas of her life. "Just rock the role, act like you know what you're doing and make your way. I think no matter what you do, if you're confident about it, you'll be successful."

When asked about how the student lobby group impacted Carly, she did not hesitate with her answer "It definitely gave me more confidence." Carly also explained how getting to know the legislators on a personal level helped with her confidence in speaking with law makers regarding topics such as her institution, MAP Grant Funding, and other topics surrounding higher education. Carly talked about how this experience gave her confidence to change her major and get more involved in student government. It also gave her the confidence to think about a future working in government or politics.

Research Question #4: How does participating in a student lobby group impact a student's overall involvement on campus and in their communities?

When observing how a student's participation in a student lobby group impacted their overall involvement, all five participants got involved in something outside of the student lobby group itself after their experience. Their involvement can be described in two broad categories: involvement within student government and involvement on campus and within the community.

Stronger Involvement in Student Government

Four of the five participants talked about how their involvement in the student lobby group increased their involvement in student government itself. Carly mentioned

joining student government to just get involved, "but after student lobby day, I realized I wanted to get more into student government,". All the participants that touched on this topic in their interview had ran and served on the executive board for student government as well. Four participants had experience serving in at least one of the five executive board positions on student government. Three of the four had overseen leading the student lobby group.

"I noticed at the capitol how the people who run the show had the biggest influence and they had the most opportunity to make change." This realization made Xavier want to run for a higher position in student government so he could make a change at his university, a place where he felt he could have the most impact.

> If you want to make a change, you need to get up into a position of power and that's just kind of a philosophy I live by now. If you want to change something, there is no value in just saying it, you need to get into it and put yourself in the position where you can make something better.

Xavier also talked about how this experience bolstered his overall attitude regarding making change and being an influence. Therefore, he focused a lot of his attention during his collegiate career towards student government because, as a student, that is where he thought he could produce the most positive change for him and his peers.

Carly was so impacted by her experience with the student lobby group that she not only changed her major from biology to political science, but she ran and was elected to two different executive positions in student government within her two years of involvement.

I remember right after lobby day I started talking to my mom about at least

minoring in political science because I really wanted to learn more about it, even

if it was not the career plan I was planning to go with at the time.

Carly also talked about how after her involvement the first year in the student lobby

group, she wanted to get even more involved in student government because she wanted

to learn more, "My involvement in the student lobby group definitely contributed to me

running for a position on the executive board."

Kassidy talked about how she ran for an executive position because of the roles

that came with the position, "I chose to run for my specific executive board position

because a major responsibility was leading the voter registration drive". All the major

roles of that position, leading the voter registration drive and student lobby group, stood

out to her because of the passion she found from her involvement with the student lobby

group her freshman year. Kassidy talked about being approached by the current executive

vice president at the time about the student lobby group, "He approached me and said,

'hey, if you're interested in EVP, it is probably important for you to learn more about

lobbying'." and afterward he approached her again about that specific executive position

because he saw how passionate she was about these things.

Max also served a position on the executive board for student government. In his

role he oversaw the student lobby group and voter registration for students on campus.

During his interview, Max expressed a lot of concern for how student lobbying will look

during a global pandemic. He wants to still have a chance for students to learn from this

opportunity, so he is hopeful that the student lobby group will have a chance to lobby in

2021 and if not, he is trying to plan something virtual that can still give students a chance

to research, speak with legislators, and lobby. Since Max is new to this role, he has a lot of ideas and plans to enhance the student lobby group and is excited to get started.

Involvement on Campus and within Community

Two participants went on to be involved in other student leadership opportunities outside of student government. Eddie got involved with the campus housing community serving as a Resident Advisor (RA) and Xavier got involved with new student programs on his campus as an Orientation Leader while also getting more involved with the student government association. Both branched outside of student government and got involved in other areas across campus, however they did not attribute their participation in the lobby group as directly affecting their decision to pursue these other opportunities.

Kassidy's involvement with the student lobby group helped her realize she wanted to make a larger impact and she thought she could do that by getting involved in her local community. She had such a passion for registering students to vote that she landed a job with the county clerk's office doing just that.

> I was encouraged to do more things locally, so I reached out to the county clerk's office and started helping them with voter registration. I am actually working for the county clerk's now. It truly came full circle. I started at the capitol lobbying, realizing we needed more work done, and now I'm helping with voter registration in the county courthouse.

Kassidy did not stop there. She saw such an importance in being involved locally that she also served as an election judge and does her best to volunteer and give back as much as she can. "It starts in your small community. I help out and volunteer within my community too. It kind of just shows how it comes full circle and how it starts small and

builds up to something bigger." Kassidy also talked about how her mom serves as her hometown's village trustee and how they enjoy going to town meetings together.

Max also talked about how his involvement with the student lobby group led to his involvement in his local community, "It definitely did make me think more about my state and my community and what I could be doing to help out." Max also talked about how after participating in the student lobby group he got involved as an election judge for his county's municipal elections.

Summary

Through this research study and from the research questions asked during the interviews, a variety of themes were found because of the responses from the participants. The chapter gave structure to the themes found based on the research questions. The participants addressed how they learned about the student lobby group, their experience participating in the student lobby group and the actual student lobby day at the capitol, and how their experience impacted their further involvement outside the student lobby group. In chapter five, the findings will be examined including recommendations for student lobby groups and suggestions for future research.

Chapter V

Discussion, Recommendations, Conclusion

This research study looked at the experiences of five students and their involvement with a student run lobby group at a mid-sized Midwestern public institution. The purpose of this study was to examine why students participate in a student lobby group, as well as explore the impact their experience had on their overall involvement afterwards. This study showed how students who are involved in a student lobby group experience a deeper understanding of government functions and gain an interest to get more involved in their civic communities. Five students who had been involved with the student-run lobby group were interviewed and asked questions (Appendix D) around the following research questions: (1) Why do students get involved in student lobby groups? (2) How does a student's involvement in a student lobby group impact their perception of civic engagement and politics in general? (3) What are some shared benefits gained by students who are actively engaged in a student lobby group? (4) How does participating in a study lobby group impact a student's overall involvement on campus and in their communities? This chapter discusses the findings of the study, implications, and recommendations for future research.

Discussion

This research study explored why students get involved with student run lobby groups and was conducted to study the impact their experience had on their perception of government and politics, as well as the impact on their current involvement on campus and in the community. This study found that student engagement happens when it aligns with what the students themselves are interested in. The study also found that their

involvement impacted their perception of how government works by enabling them to see the bigger picture. Students also were able to see legislators as relatable human beings from their experience on the student lobby group.

The study showed that the participants in the student lobby group gained confidence from their experience speaking to legislators on important topics. This confidence gained was not only utilized in their ability to speak to legislators but transferred over to other aspects of their lives as involved students. The study found that the confidence gained inspired some participants to think about their future working in government or running for office. It also found that the experience from participating in the student run lobby group taught students the importance of voting and the importance of students having a voice.

Lastly, the study found that their involvement in the student run lobby group impacted their future and further involvement in Registered Student Organizations, specifically in the student government association and their involvement within their community. The experience on the student lobby group inspired four of the five participants to run and serve as an executive board member for the student government association after their involvement with the student run lobby group. Also, two of the participants furthered their engagement in their community by working, volunteering, and interning at the county clerk's office to help register people to vote and serving as an election judge in their perspective communities.

Implications

This study revolves around the experiences of students participating in a student run lobby group. The leader of the student run lobby group and the professionals that

provide support to this group have a large impact on the overall experience of each member. Understanding how they can cultivate and improve these experiences is important to the progression of student run lobby groups.

Leaders of Student Run Lobby Groups

This study found that student engagement happens when it aligns with what the students themselves are interested in. Therefore, it was no surprise that most students who get involved in a student run lobby group had some degree of prior interest in learning about government/politics, were a political science major, or were already involved in the student government association on campus. The students in this study thought it was important that more people learn about this opportunity on campus. If students are interested in learning more about this area, but they are not a political science major or involved in the student government association, then they might not hear about or know about this opportunity on their campus. Due to this, it would be essential for the student run lobby group to expand their demographics when recruiting students to ensure that as many students as possible have this experience. Making sure the group increases their presence on campus will increase the number of students who get involved and it will help the student run lobby group lay a stronger foundation moving forward.

A typical lobby day for a student run lobby group consists of the group traveling to their state capitol, speaking with legislators from their hometowns and from the district where the institution is located, and getting to sit in the gallery of the House or Senate to watch debates. Student run lobby groups might also get the chance to tour the capitol, be recognized on the House or Senate floor, or get to sit in on some of the committees that might be taking place the day of their visit. A lot of this also depends on whether the

student run lobby group is participating in a state-wide student lobby day and whether the student run lobby group has a relationship and is working with the institution's government liaison.

It is important that leaders of student run lobby groups create relationships with higher up administration on their campus and the government liaison for their institution. If student run lobby groups work closely with the administrators on their campus, they can find issues that they align with and their lobbying efforts will be more effective. Administrative leaders might also have tips and advice for students involved in the student run lobby group from their experience. This advice can be helpful to students whether it is who to talk to or where to spend their time.

Working closely with the government liaison can be essential in the success of the student run lobby group. The government liaison works closely with administration and with legislators from the district where the institution is located. They work in the capitol and can provide an understanding to students on how things operate in the legislative and governmental offices. Having a relationship with this individual allows the student run lobby group to utilize their time effectively by lobbying the legislators that have direct ties to their institution. This person might also know which legislators are members of the different committees connected to higher education and can help direct members of the student run lobby group to where they need to go when looking for specific offices.

Student Affairs Professionals

Although it is a student run lobby group, student affairs professionals can assist this group by not only supporting them, but by also challenging them and holding them accountable. Each student run lobby group will differ based on location and institution.

Student affairs professionals need to help the group create a core foundation of standards and a timeline for preparing for the visit with government officials and what they will do for the actual student lobby day itself. It will also be vital that student affairs professionals follow up and reflect on the experiences the students had afterward.

Depending on how the student run lobby group wants to be organized, and the size that can go to the student lobby day, one way that student affairs professionals can assist the group is in creating an application and interview process to be a part of the group that outreaches to a larger potential pool of students. This will help the group be organized, especially if there is a limit on the number of students who can attend the student lobby day. This process could also help the group choose members who are able and willing to put in the work needed for the day to be successful. A time commitment is required since students will need to meet prior to attending the student lobby day to learn more about the governmental processes, who their legislators are, and what issues they want to lobby on behalf of students at their institution. Due to this, time is needed for research and preparing for the lobby day itself.

A timeline would also be beneficial for the group to guarantee that each year the students leading will know when they should begin recruiting, the application/interview process, and meetings to ensure a successful student lobby group and student lobby day. Creating a timeline will help student affairs professionals hold the student leader accountable and will allow them to follow up to make sure tasks are being completed. This could also allow the student affairs professionals to work with the student run lobby group to set goals based on their timeline. Each year is different, and with that comes new

goals and objectives for the group. Having a timeline will help the group realistically set their intentions for the coming year.

Based on how the student run lobby group is ran, student affairs professionals can also help confirm that each member is doing their research and contacting the legislators they are planning to meet with on the day of the student lobby day. Creating a checklist for each member with their tasks might also be valuable for the students and professionals helping them. If planning is not done ahead of time, a student might miss out on the opportunity to meet and speak with their state legislator which could greatly impact their overall experience.

Most importantly, student affairs professionals need to ensure that after the student lobby day, the student run lobby group continues to meet to process their experience. Following up with the students shortly after will allow the experience to be fresh and an assessment can be made on the efforts of the group. This will allow student affairs professionals to assess what the group liked, did not like, thought they did well, what they thought they could work on, etc. This will also give student affairs professionals the chance to see what each student learned and help them process their own experience and what they got out of it.

Recommendation for Future Research

There is very little existing research on the motivations and effects of participation in student lobbying experiences, so any additional research will be welcomed to provide a better understanding of the impact of student involvement with these kinds of programs. This study looked at a single, mid-sized institution in the Midwest. Additional studies that would provide greater understanding could include

studies focused on large, flag-ship institutions with more political connections to their state government, different parts of the country, and with specialized institutions such as HBCUs, HSIs, Technical Schools, and other types of public institutions. Future research could also look at how students will navigate post COVID-19 when it comes to student lobbying and speaking with legislators.

Additionally, although invitations were sent to all students who were in the student lobbying program, the participants of this study were all white. And though there were male and female participants, this study did not examine any differences in the experiences of different genders. Future studies could specifically address the experiences of students of color, women, men, members of the LGBTQ community, and other student demographics.

One limit for the current research was that participants that were interviewed had a hard time reflecting on their experience due to the time between participating in the student run lobby group and being interviewed. This was mostly in part due to the global pandemic that was taking place at the time that canceled the current group's most recent planned trip to lobby at the state capitol. Therefore, finding individuals to be participants in this study was limited and many of the experiences shared had to rely on memories from a few years prior to the interview. An assessment of the experience immediately afterward, combined with series of regular follow ups would allow for greater understanding of the long-term outcomes that come from their experiences with the student run lobby group. By exploring this, research can potentially show how a student's experience in a student run lobby group truly impacts their further involvement or outlook in their community and civic engagement.

Conclusion

There has not been a lot of research done on the experiences of political student leaders, especially looking at the experiences of those involved with a student run lobby group on college campuses. Therefore, this research is important in understanding the experience of these type of leaders and how student affairs professionals and student leaders of student run lobby groups can enhance the experience of future students who choose to get involved. Although research has been done regarding student activism on college campuses, not much research has taken place looking at student run lobby groups and the experiences of the students involved. This may be partially due to lobbying being a somewhat newer form of activism for college students. This current research was conducted to fill that void. Using a qualitative method and semi-structured interviews, this study looked deeper at the experiences and perceptions of students who participated in the institution's student run lobby group.

The research conducted revealed that the experiences and knowledge gained from a student's experience with the student run lobby group impacts them both as an undergraduate student and citizen. A student run lobby group provides a rich and unique experience that is not like anything else they can find on a college campus. The chance to confidently speak with state legislators on topics that are relevant and important to both themselves personally and their campus is not only a great skill to develop, but it is also a rare opportunity that most people do not get the chance to partake in. The hope of these groups is to create more engaged citizens and a better understanding of how government works. By doing so, they will be able to understand other points of view, especially those who differ from them, and hopefully create a less political polarized society.

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APPENDIX A

Informed Consent Form for Participants

You are invited to participate in a research study that focuses on your experience and involvement in the student-run lobby group on campus. The Principal Investigator is gathering data from past and current students who were involved. This research is being conducted as part of a requirement for the Masters of Science program in College Student Affairs at Eastern Illinois University. Dr. Jon Coleman is my thesis advisor and I, Catie Witt, am the Principal Investigator on the project. If you have questions about this project, you may contact the thesis advisor, Dr. Jon Coleman at jkcoleman@eiu.edu or myself, the principal investigator, Catie Witt at cdwitt@eiu.edu .

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

There are no foreseeable risks to the participants. All responses will remain confidential. Participants may benefit from being a participant in this study by getting the opportunity to reflect on their experience being a part of the student lobby group. The potential benefits outweigh any risks to the participants, and the risks and benefits are both minor. The findings of the proposed study may help the Student Life Office, the student lobby group and student affairs administrators at Eastern Illinois University.

CONFIDENTIALITY

All data will be reported in the aggregate and using participant self-selected pseudonyms. The computer used by the primary investigator is password protected and only the primary investigator has access to the files stored on this computer. Transcriptions will be kept on a separate USB drive and will be password protected as well as stored in a locked drawer. If participants formally withdraw from the study at any point in time, their feedback will be destroyed and not be included in the final reporting. After the research is completed, the raw data will be kept for three years. After three years, data will be destroyed in compliance with EIU IRB requirements.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

Your decision to participate is completely voluntary. Should you choose to participate in the study, you will be asked to interview with the primary investigator of the study for approximately one hour on the topic of your involvement with the student-run lobby group on campus. The interview will be audio recorded; however, the researcher will not place your name on any documents resulting from the interview. You will be asked to provide a pseudonym for your names to be used in analysis. You have the right to terminate your participation at any time without penalty.

APPENDIX B

E-mail Template for Potential Participants

Hello, (Student),

My name is Catie Witt and am a graduate student in the College Student Affairs Master's program at Eastern Illinois University. I am conducting research that focuses on the experiences of students involved in EIU's Student Action Team. This research is a required part of my degree program and you have been invited to participate because of your involvement with the EIU Student Action Team as an undergraduate student.

If you are interested in participating in this research, you will be asked to attend a 45-60 minute interview for my research. Due to the on-going pandemic and with the interviews taking place over the summer, these interviews will most likely be held on Zoom or Microsoft Teams.

If you decide that you would like to participate, please fill out the attached demographic data card so that I can know a little more about you before the interview. Thank you for your time, and for helping me in completing this research.

Catie Witt

Department of Counseling and Higher Education

Eastern Illinois University

APPENDIX C

Demographic Data Card

1. What year in school are you?

2. What is your age?

3. How do you identify your racial identity?

4. What pronouns would you like me to use?

5. What is your major?

APPENDIX D

Interview Protocol

1. What year were you involved with the EIU's Student Action Team?

2. When did you first learn/hear about student lobbying?
   a. What did you think it meant?

3. How did you learn about the Student Action Team?

4. Can you tell me about how you decided you wanted to get involved with the Student Action Team?
   a. How did you learn about the Student Action Team?
   b. What was it like applying to be a part of it?

5. Prior to starting your involvement with the Student Action Team, what did you expect it to be about?
   a. Was that expectation accurate?
   b. Was it what you were expecting?

6. What did you contribute as a member of the Student Action Team?

7. Can you tell me what you thought about the student lobby day?

   a. Did you feel prepared? Was it organized? What did you do?

8. What was your favorite part about the Springfield Lobby Day?

9. What was your favorite part about being involved with the Student Action Team?

10. What did you learn from being a part of the student lobby group?
    a. Did anything you learn or experience surprise you?
    b. Was there anything you were expecting to learn that you did not?

11. Is there anything you would have changed about your experience?

12. After your involvement with the Student Action Team, what other organizations did you get involved with on campus?
    a. Can you describe how your time with the Student Action Team affected your decision to get involved with those organizations?
    b. What other activities or groups did you get involved with because of your experience with the Student Action Team?

13. How do you think your involvement with the Student Action Team will affect you going forward, both here at school and after graduation?