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Is the Customer Always Right?

An Exploration into the Expectations of Student Affairs Professionals

Brittany Floyd

Eastern Illinois University

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to gain perspective of how student affairs professionals are managing the changing dynamic of the student. The researcher sought to explore how student affairs professionals cope with the expectation that the “customer is always right” while encouraging students’ development. It was found that student affairs professionals share a common goal to assist and serve students, but administration, parents, and students have clear expectations as to how they do so. It was found that the customer service mantra “the customer is always right” does exist on a college campus, and it comes with a cost. According to the participants, giving the student what they want may improve enrollment and retention numbers, but the student’s development suffers. It was found that today’s college student is embarking on their college career with more complex needs and challenges than any generation before. Furthermore, students are ill-prepared for college, reliant on technology, socially anxious, and seek the fastest, easiest options. For these reasons, it is important for parents, K-12 teachers, and student affairs professionals to encourage students to critically think, problem solve, and find their own voice.

DEDICATION

I would also like to dedicate this to the student affairs professionals who have to explain what they do at *each* and *every* family function, who wake up and show up every day, and who wear many hats and work countless hours without much acknowledgment. Your experiences, hard work, and dedication to students and higher education is invaluable.

This thesis is also dedicated to first-gen students. I know coming to college can be an exciting yet stressful experience. Remember your “why” for being here. Focus on your goals. Don’t sell yourself short. You never know... you may come to college, find your purpose, and never leave.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge my large selfless support system –Joe, my partner and ‘favorite person’, my dad, Jon & Janene, Rhonda, Jennie & Luke, and my closest girlfriends, Sydney, Jennifer, Madi, Kaitlin, and Glam-ma Jac. Thank you for always supporting me in your own unique ways. I owe it all to you. To my nieces and nephews, I know you are too young to understand what a thesis is, but I hope you read this one day and know that if I can do this, you can too.

To my thesis advisor, Dr. Roberts, and committee members, Dr. Davenport, and Dr. Webb – Thank you for your endless motivation, patience, flexibility, and dedication to not only me and this project – but to each one of your students. I hope you know how appreciated you are.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	ii
DEDICATION	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iv
CHAPTER I	1
INTRODUCTION	1
Purpose of the Study	3
Research Questions	4
Significance of the Study	4
Limitations of the Study	4
Definition of Terms	5
Summary	5
CHAPTER II	7
LITERATURE REVIEW	7
History of the Student Affairs Professional	7
Student Entitlement and Consumer Attitude in Higher Education	10
Helicopter Parenting	12
Impact on the child’s mental health	14
Higher Expectations	16
Theoretical Framework	19

Self-Authorship Theory.....	19
Self-Determination Theory.....	21
Summary.....	22
CHAPTER III.....	25
METHODOLOGY.....	25
Design of Study.....	25
Participants.....	25
Research Site.....	27
Instrumentation.....	27
Data Collection.....	27
Treatment of Data.....	28
CHAPTER IV.....	30
ANALYSIS.....	30
Role of Student Affairs Professionals.....	30
Get students to commit to campus.....	31
Get students to stay on campus.....	32
Changes Experienced by Student Affairs Professionals.....	34
Effects of budget crisis.....	34
Unprepared students with complex needs.....	38
Handholding paired with a sense of entitlement.....	39
Increased student mental health concerns.....	42

Technology created a socially anxious, microwave society	43
Interactions with Students and Parents	45
Parents are more involved than ever before.....	45
Dissatisfaction is time consuming and results in threats to higher authority.....	49
Coping Strategies for Student Affairs Professionals	51
Listen.....	52
Be real	52
Additional training is needed.....	53
Encourage face-to-face communication	54
Summary	54
CHAPTER V	56
DISCUSSION	56
RQ 1: What are the participants’ perspectives on the role of student affairs professionals?....	56
RQ 2: What expectations do students have of student affairs professionals?.....	58
RQ 3: What coping strategies do student affairs professionals bring to balance this new phenomenon of a student-consumer attitude and sense of entitlement?.....	61
Recommendations for Future Research	62
Implications.....	63
Summary	65
REFERENCES	67
Appendix A.....	73

Appendix B 75

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

“Aunt Becky is going to jail” was an international headline that became a part of comedic pop culture seemingly overnight in early 2019. Lori Loughlin, a popular TV actress most known for her role as wholesome Rebecca Donaldson-Katsopolis or “Aunt Becky” in the 1980-90s sitcom “Full House” and recent reboot “Fuller House”, was arrested and later pled guilty to conspiracy to commit mail and wire fraud after she and her husband paid other individuals to falsify their children’s admission documents and test scores. These felonious actions secured two admission spots at Southern California University for Loughlin’s teenage daughters that were neither ethically nor legally earned. Loughlin was only one of more than 50 individuals charged in, what is now known as, Operation Varsity Blues. She was sentenced to two months in prison for her participation.

The 2019 college admissions scandal shed a light on parental involvement or over-involvement in higher education. Soon after the scandal hit mainstream media, an article was written in the New York Times, which featured Dr. Medline Levine, psychologist, and author of “Teach Your Children Well: Why Values and Coping Skills Matter More than Grades, Trophies or ‘Fat Envelopes’” (Miller and Bromwich, 2019). Levine believed the scandal “highlighted an incredibly dark side of what has become normative, which is making sure that your kid has the best, is exposed to the best, has every advantage — without understanding how disabling that can be” (para 3). The old saying “hindsight is 20/20” was proven to be true in Loughlin’s case. During her sentencing in August 2020, Loughlin stated “I thought I was acting out of love for my children, but in reality, it only undermined and diminished my daughters’ abilities and accomplishments” (Rosa, 2020, para 8).

While the admissions scandal is an extreme and criminal example, parents going to great lengths to obtain a certain outcome or experience for their student is not a new behavior. Descriptors like helicopter and snowplow have been used to stylize overbearing, strict, micro-managing, or controlling parenting styles throughout the last decades, but the terms do have differences. The term helicopter parent emerged to describe a parent who hovers over their student and can see things that others cannot, and because of this, the parent(s) can and will arrive quickly in a problematic situation or emergency. Snowplow parents differ from helicopter parents in that they plow or clear the path of any problem before their student can even encounter it (Miller and Bromwich, 2019). Parents, who fit into either category, argue they only want what is best for their child. They do not want to see their child struggle or experience failure. But until what age is this appropriate and what price does the student ultimately pay in terms of their autonomy, resiliency, self-esteem, and development?

Scelfo (2019) stated helicopter and snowplow parenting results in adult children who are unable to face even a minor setback or disappointment. These now-adult-children lack the skills to live independently, make decisions, and navigate challenges. Miller and Bromwich (2019) stated college are freshmen dropping out and going home because they lack the skills to function and live on their own without their parent(s). Dr. Levine stated some reasons students went home including too much sauce served on the food in the dining center, a rodent in the residence hall, a roommate conflict, and lack of study skills (Miller and Bromwich, 2019). Julie Lythcott-Haims, former dean of freshmen at Stanford University, witnessed parents registering their student for classes, contacting professors about grades, and meeting with staff about student conflicts (Scelfo, 2019). She also witnessed students using their parents to arrange get-togethers with other students in their residence hall, and some parents even contacted internship

supervisors if their child's internship did not secure employment (Miller and Bromwich, 2019). Lythcott-Haims (Scelfo, 2019) stated parents would contact professors about grades and meet with higher education staff about disagreements. "The point is to prepare the kid for the road, not prepare the road for the kid" (Miller and Bromwich, 2019, para 23).

Research suggests that a correlation exists between helicopter parenting and student entitlement, which may result in a consumer-like attitude (Barton & Hirsch, 2016, Deci, 2007). In the corporate sector, a popular mantra is "the consumer is always right", which highlights the importance of immediate satisfaction. In higher education, student affairs professionals prioritize consumer satisfaction, but student development is also a top priority. Student development and a relationship-centered approach can have a long-term positive impact, but the outcome may not immediately present itself in the same fashion as one may receive in the corporate sector like a refund, coupon, or a complimentary or upgraded service. Rather, the outcome may include increased confidence, persistence, and the proper skillset to manage their own life beyond college (Frederick, Sasso, & Barratt, 2015). "Whether explicit and tacit, present, and future students perceive higher education promises that, if they choose to study with us, their lives will be enriched and improved as a result. Unless we do everything that we can to assure those promises are being fulfilled, we fall well short of performing as we should" (Frederick et al., 2015, p.21). If students do possess a consumer-like attitude and a sense of entitlement, how do student affairs professionals balance a student's desire for immediate satisfaction and long-term development and enrichment?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to gain perspective of how student affairs professionals are managing the changing dynamic of the student. The researcher seeks to explore how student

affairs professionals uphold the expectation that the “customer is always right” while encouraging students’ development. Understanding the role of student affairs professionals while assessing these topics will add to the limited body of research and create more thorough and specific suggestions for student affairs professionals to holistically satisfy the student in the short-term and long-term.

Research Questions

The following questions were used to guide this qualitative study:

1. What are the participants’ perspectives on the role of student affairs professionals?
2. What expectations do students have of student affairs professionals?
3. What coping strategies do student affairs professionals bring to balance this new phenomenon of a student-consumer attitude and sense of entitlement?

Significance of the Study

By gaining insight on the perspectives and expectations of student affairs professionals as well as the coping strategies they use to balance student entitlement, more thorough and specific suggestions for student affairs professionals may emerge. This insight may lead to increased student satisfaction, enhanced student development and better prepared student affairs professionals to support, assist, and retain students.

Limitations of the Study

Several limitations exist within this study. First, the researcher and this study’s participants are employed at the research site, which is a public, midsized, rural, and predominately white Midwestern university. While some of the participants have worked at other institutions across the United States, this site paired with a smaller sample size creates a lack of generalizability. The information may not represent student affairs professionals as a

whole and may not be applicable to those working at a university with different demographics. Lastly, the participants may know or be familiar with the researcher and what the nature of her work is, which could elicit bias to some responses.

Definition of Terms

Helicopter parent: A parent who takes an overprotective or excessive interest in the life of their child or children. Originated from the notion of the parent “hovering” over the child or children (Oxford University Press, 2020).

Consumer: A person who purchases goods and services for personal use (Oxford University Press, 2020).

Attitude: A settled way of thinking or feeling about someone or something, typically one that is reflected in a person’s behavior (Oxford University Press, 2020).

Sense of Entitlement: Pervasive sense that one deserves more and is entitled to more than others (Lessard et al., 2011).

Summary

The effects of parenting in relation to college students is a topic that continues to develop. Helicopter parenting is no longer a standalone term. There are several ‘nicknames’ that are assigned to parents based on their parenting style. The overarching principle is that parents want what is best for their children and they will go to great depths to protect or, in Lori Loughlin’s case, obtain things for their children in hopes of giving them a brighter future. But with that, comes a sense of entitlement (Conneely et al., 2001). What hasn’t been thoroughly explored is how student affairs professionals balance and cope with this phenomenon on university campuses. The idea that “the customer is always right” is focusing on the immediate, short-term satisfaction; the consumer wants *something* right now. The researcher sought to develop a better

understanding as to how student affairs professionals balance this ideology with student development and explore the expectations that they have for themselves and their work.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, the researcher will explore and analyze existing research on the history of student affairs professionals, helicopter parenting and the impact on the student, the consumer attitude and sense of entitlement in higher education, and relevant theories regarding self-authorship, self-determination, and student development. This review is an effort to understand how helicopter parenting combined with a consumer attitude and sense of entitlement may affect the student's development and the student affairs professional's ability to holistically assist the student.

History of the Student Affairs Professional

According to Hevel (2016), the first student affairs professionals were created after presidents and faculty members grew tired of monitoring students and teaching classes simultaneously. These professionals served as deans of students and deans of specific populations like men and women. At the time, dean positions were the most common role, especially dean of men (Hevel, 2016). Some professionals believed their job was to complete tasks higher administration did not want to do. "The first dean of men at Purdue confessed, 'I discovered that every unpleasant task that the president or faculty did not want to do was my task'" (Schwartz, 2010, p.4 quoted in Hevel, 2016, p. 850).

According to Leonard (1956) as cited in Komives and Woodard (2003), in the early years of higher education, college students were viewed as immature children who needed additional guidance, supervision, occupational advice, and remedial classes inside the dormitories. Staff were encouraged to act in loco parentis or in place of the parents, so college life was highly structured (Waryold & Lancaster, 2008). While staffs' focus was on the students' conduct and

well-being, some began to see that a student needed more than a disciplinary figure (Hevel, 2016). Rudolph (1965), quoted in Komives and Woodard (2003), discussed collegiate life and stated, “a curriculum, a library, a faculty, and students are not enough to make a college” (p. 87). A student needed to develop as a whole person.

In the 1920s, the “student personnel movement” gained momentum on college campuses, and new professions were created (Hevel, 2016). Professional responsibilities in these positions included operating housing facilities, academic advising, career counseling, record keeping, and the distribution of scholarships (Hevel, 2016). According to Hevel (2016):

The responsibilities materialized in several ways: by acquiring supervision of existing functions on campus (e.g., student publications), by creating new services (e.g., orientation programs), and by being delegated time-consuming and largely undesirable tasks (e.g., campus discipline) (p. 850).

“Student personnel workers also studied those students who left college “to ensure students who were admitted would succeed”. They found low GPAs, financial struggles, and difficulty adjusting to campus social life led students to leave college” (Certis, 2014, p. 263 cited in Hevel, 2016, p. 850).

In 1926, “the National Research Council requested that the American Council on Education study “personnel practices” (Pritchard & McChesney, 2018, para 1). One investigation, led by L.B. Hopkins for the Committee on Personnel Methods, sought to examine what institutions do to encourage and assist student development.

The results of this survey resulted in a seminal report and call to action entitled *The Student Personnel Point of View* (1937) arguing for a more deliberate institutional approach to the student’s experience, including intellectual, emotional, physical, social,

vocational, moral, economic, and aesthetic aptitudes (Pritchard & McChesney, 2018, p. 2).

Komives and Woodard (2003) stated:

The report emphasized the importance of understanding the individual student, the importance of coordinating the major functions of instruction and management, and the notion that student services should be offered and organized in ways that support the unique mission of each college (p. 72).

In 1947, the report was revised to state that education should include the student's physical, social, emotion, spiritual, and intellectual development (Komives and Woodard, 2003). "From this idea, the field of student affairs was born" (Pritchard & McChesney, 2018, p. 2).

Following WWII, the GI bill, and monumental court rulings, student affairs evolved as a practice and profession (Pritchard & McChesney, 2018, Long, 2012). "The legal concept of in loco parentis was greatly eroded by the courts" (Long, 2012, p. 4). *Dixon v. Alabama State Board of Education* and other subsequent court rulings determined that a person is a legal adult at age 18, the relationships between colleges and students are contractual, and students are allowed due process (Long, 2012). In the 1970s and 1980s, student affairs was professionalized with national associations, publications, and theories (Long, 2012). By the 1990s, student affairs professionals were learning to adapt to technology and the diverse college student population. Long (2012) stated "During this twenty-year period, the diversity of students increased in every respect" (p. 5). Reflecting on student affairs as a profession now, Pritchard and McChesney (2018) said:

Student affairs connects the work of higher education to the development of students.

Their work develops critical, informed citizens; encourages respect for the basic worth of

individual lives; promotes diversity and inclusion; and helps students realize their own social identity and full potential (p. 2).

Long (2012) stated “the education of the whole student is likely to remain the core focus of student affairs in the future, but student affairs professionals will be challenged to think about educating the student differently (p. 6).

Student Entitlement and Consumer Attitude in Higher Education

Campbell et al. (2004) referred to student entitlement as a “pervasive sense that one deserves more and is entitled to more than others” (p.31). Other researchers have conceptualized the idea of student entitlement as the idea or attitude that students and parents are paying customers, and they expect to be treated as such (Conneely et al., 2011). "A growing number of today's generation of college students exhibit a new combination of attitudes, outlooks, and orientations to their work and toward others—frequently described as student entitlement—to which many professors are unaccustomed and unprepared to address" (Lippmann et al., 2009, para. 6). Barton & Hirsh (2016) determined the student’s sense of entitlement is an effect of permissive parenting.

Importantly, permissive parenting, via entitlement, appears to contribute to a number of characteristics that may impede academic success, including less sense of meaning and purpose in life, less autonomy and mastery of the world around them, and poorer relationships with others (Barton & Hirsch, 2016, p. 6).

The authors stated it is possible that permissive parents may cause their child to have unrealistic expectations about their college experience inside and outside of the classroom. When the childrens’ expectations are not met or they experience unexpected conflict, they may not have the proper self-regulatory skills to be successful and may experience cognitive

dissonance. Barton and Heirsch (2016) stated student entitlement is linked to negative attitudes, behaviors, and mental health in the academic setting.

Fullerton (2013) examined student-consumer attitudes in relation to entitlement. The study examined 76 students through a focus group. Fullerton (2013) asked the students if they deserve to be treated as a customer of the university. Seventy-four students responded “yes”. Two participants expressed that they prefer the term consumer rather than customer, because “consumer implies the right to go elsewhere for better service” (p. 32). Most participants expect quality service from university employees, because tuition is expensive. This study determined students believe they are consumers who are paying for a product: *college*.

An increasing number of parents believe it is more important to get the best financial value rather than the best wholistic, educational experience (Conneelly et al., 2010). Parents view college selection and their student’s overall college experience as a negotiation, and they can demand changes much like consumers demand price adjustments, refunds, and exchanges. The parents pay the tuition, therefore, they are allowed a seat at the table with policy makers (Sommers and Settle, 2011). Furthermore, a special emphasis is placed on value. With the internet at their fingertips supplying a plethora of Google search results, personal reviews, private social media groups, and discussion boards, parents and their students are much more particular in their choices and decisions (Conneelly et al., 2011). Parents, and to some extent students, often seem more interested in getting the best value for their money than seeking the best learning opportunity.

A consumer attitude with special attentiveness to value is increasing at both public and private universities (Conneelly et al., 2011).

Academic entitlement appears, in part, to be related to expectations of special treatment derived from permissive parents; however, such expectations are likely to be incompatible with those in most university classes and, thus, may contribute to poor psychological adjustment as awareness of the dissonance increases” (Barton & Hirsch, 2006, p.7).

Fortunately, universities have many approaches within their power to combat this sense of entitlement and external locus of control, such that students can come to understand how effective self-regulatory strategies can positively impact their academic success and, hence, their mental health and college adjustment" (p. 7). Student Affairs professionals are found on the receiving end of this type of attitude, specifically in situations when the parent(s) is unsure of the university’s expectations, policies, or procedures as they relate to their child. “Parents learn quickly to capitalize on institutional chaos and contact a different administrator when they do not achieve their desired outcome at the first point of contact" (Daniel et al., 2001, p. 4). To summarize the consumer attitude regarding the college experience, “privilege and honor have been succeeded by value and entitlement” (Conneely et al., 2011, p. 52).

Helicopter Parenting

Until the 1960s, universities acted in *loco parentis*, or “in place of the parent” (Lee, 2011). Under *loco parentis*, universities held decision-making power over students who were without parental guidance (Lee, 2011). Since then, there has been a shift in the attitude, presence, and role of the college-student parent. Although the term is relatively new and was not added to the Merriam-Webster dictionary until 2011, *helicopter parent* is a title that is popular in the mainstream media and academia. This title is also one that student affairs professionals are familiar with (LeTrent, 2013).

To understand the comparison of an actual helicopter and a parenting style, one parent in Gregory (2015) explained that helicopters see things that people on the ground cannot see. Helicopters can arrive and quickly assist in emergencies and parents can too. Additionally, Gregory (2015) described the helicopter parent as a parent who is “over-protective, intrusive, or even controlling” (para. 8). Sommers & Settle (2010) categorized some helicopter parents as “toxic”. Taking it further, some believe the ‘hovering’ of helicopter parents can weaken a student’s development and hinder the transition from adolescence into adulthood (Karl & Peluchette, 2016; LeTrent, 2013).

Van Ingen et al. (2015) related the tight-reined relationship between children and their parents back to the mindset of many “baby boomers”. Van Ingen et al., (2015) stated a primary focus for baby boomer parents, who began sending their children to college in the early 2000s, was child-rearing and providing their children with the best possibilities. These authors go on to say that, at the time, baby boomer parents were the highest-earning and educated parents in history. With money and education comes vast resources that parents utilize for the betterment of their children. Unlike past generations of parents, current parents have a better understanding of the college experience as they, too, once attended college.

Parents’ familiarity with the postsecondary educational experience creates an interesting oxymoron in their relationships with colleges today. On the one hand, today’s educated parents are more likely to prioritize education and be knowledgeable about the college experience (for example, the nomenclature, academic expectations). On the other hand, today’s parents experienced a college environment that no longer exists (Daniel et al., 2001, p. 8).

Helicopter parents are known to go beyond the traditional role of providing encouragement and support regardless of the child's age (Vianden & Ruder, 2002). Parents may become over-involved with their student's college experience, because they are trying to protect their college-age student much like they did when they were a child. Some parents have even tried to "cancel" the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) in attempt to access their student's information more quickly (Sommers & Settle, 2010). Parents no longer drop their child off on move-in day and leave (Conneely et al., 2011). Daniel et al., (2001) stated:

Parents scheduled their campus visits, dominated the interactions while there, outlined or even wrote major parts of their college application, and decided whether the students would attend pre-matriculation orientations. These are the parents who will telephone faculty members or deans when students tell them about inattention or perceived injustices (p. 7).

In an article titled "Our Best Friend is Moving Away", Vianden & Ruder (2002) determined parents are simply protecting their student from unnecessary stress, and they are most concerned about the emotional and social transition for their children (Vianden & Ruder, 2002). Daniel et al. (2001) suggested that parents who treat or think of their college-age student as a child will be more involved. The rise of parental involvement makes some believe *in loco parentis* may actually make a comeback (Couture et al., 2017).

Impact on the child's mental health. Cui (2020) examined the relationship between helicopter parenting and mental health through several studies in the last 10 years. Cui's previous research concluded there is a correlation between mental health concerns including depression, anxiety, and psychological maladjustment and helicopter parenting. In 2020, Hong and Cui expanded the current research with a concentration on the mechanisms and the causality of the

two. They examined 432 emerging adult college students from two large universities in the Midwest through structural equation modeling. Their findings suggest that a parent's interference with pre-existing, potential problems can send the message to their child that the parent is not confident in their own problem-solving capabilities and therefore the student feels a lack of self-control, which results in lower self-esteem (Hong & Cui, 2020). Their study also concluded that effects on the child's mental health is more prevalent when the child lives at home through college. Helicopter parents tend to be the "superhero" for their child who may even be considered legally an adult, however these individuals must be able to make their own decisions, communicate their thoughts, and rely on self-control to manage conflicts on and off campus.

Adjustment is a popular theme in relation to helicopter parenting and the child's mental health. Van Ingen et al., (2015) examined 190 undergraduate students at a public, liberal arts college in the Midwest. The study determined students may be able to adjust well socially, but they are not contributing to the social environment as an individual; they simply confirm to satisfy group norms. Additionally, van Ingen et al., (2015) concluded helicopter parenting can affect a student's ability to cope with change and conflict, and helicopter parenting, especially in mothers, largely contributes to the negative effect of low self-efficacy in students. "If part of the purpose of adolescence is identity formation, and the purpose of parenting is to gradually foster independence, then delayed identity formation and dependence on one's parents leave college students unprepared for real-life experiences" (van Ingen et al., 2015, para 5). The child's reliance on their parent and lack of autonomy can cause an increase in anxiety and low self-esteem (van Ingen et al., 2015).

Taking it further, Hong & Cui (2020) suggest that increased parental involvement and decreased self-esteem, together, result in maladjustment on campus. This maladjustment, then,

results in anxiety and depression. A study in 2019 had similar findings (Wenze et al., 2019). The results of this study determined higher levels of helicopter parenting resulted in higher rates of depressive and anxiety symptoms. Additionally, Wenze et al. (2019) found that “the relationship between autonomy, support, and depression was mediated by expressive suppression” (p. 278). The findings suggest helicopter parenting ultimately contributes to a lack of coping skills and appraising negative emotions and triggers. Even as college students are seeking a new and separate identity, Youniss and Smollar (1985) stated that “college students still view their parents as authority figures who have the right to set rules and expectations for their behavior” (p. 967).

Higher Expectations. Suttell (2007) determined that traditional students and their parents have higher expectations than generations before, and their expectations go beyond the classroom. These expectations exist within the residence hall and throughout campus. Suttell (2007) stated, “they (parents) are far more discriminating and have higher expectations for luxury and comfort amenities as a norm” (p. 11). A study in 2017 found that 43% of their student participants believe college or university value student satisfaction more than student development. One participant stated their parents believe student affairs offices are intended to provide a service, which they are paying for. One participant also stated that college students need more guidance than those in college ten years ago. Seventy-two percent of the participants strongly agreed or agreed with this belief (Couture et al., 2017).

The Vice President of Student Affairs at University of Georgia, Richard Mellendore, stated "managing the difference between the expectations of our students, parents, faculty, administrators, legislators, and community members, and our ability to serve them is our primary challenge" (Klein, 2004 p. 46). While the idea of providing great service can be seen as “part of

the job”, what happens when a student affairs professional is working through a conflict with two families who have two different desired outcomes? Daniel et al. (2001) stated:

The role in higher education to accommodate multiple, diverse viewpoints creates an imbalance between the roles of family and higher education staff. Murky guidelines for family involvement led to inconsistent interactions from campus to campus and, more alarmingly, from office to office on the same campus. Parents learn quickly to capitalize on institutional chaos and contact a different administrator when they do not achieve their desired outcome at the first point of contact (pp. 3-4).

While a simple solution for student affairs professionals may be to adopt the customer service ideology “the customer (student and parent) is always right”, the staff member would be like a helicopter parent, hovering and arriving as soon as there is a problem. Some believe institutions and staff are going down the wrong path by continuously transforming policies and practices to make parents and students happy. These changes and behaviors may ultimately affect students in ways like those of helicopter parenting (Couture et al., 2017).

Recommendations. Parents are physically capable of taking a back seat to *assist* their child in the decision-making process rather than making the decision for their student, but they may need help from college administrators to break old habits and form new ones (Conneely et al., 2001). Price (2008) found that communication and a partnership between the parent and student affairs professional may help resolve some of the frustration and false expectation. Price (2008) suggested that student affairs professionals educate parents on student development to understand why institutions function the way they do. Without understanding student development, certain practices performed by staff may seem counterintuitive or irrational.

Furthermore, parents may not understand why student affairs professionals first try to mediate a conflict between two students rather than making it quickly go away as if it did not happen. “When parents understand that the primary objective is not just eliminating mistakes but providing multiple opportunities for student learning, then they see these efforts differently (Price, 2008, p. 32). Price (2008) suggested that student affairs professionals inform parents of what to expect in terms of ordinary challenges for new students, campus resources, college environment, and how all parties involved can partner together.

“While much of this information may relate to issues and services outside the purview of student affairs, it is still appropriate for student affairs professionals to deliver these messages because they are typically the best prepared to help families understand the comprehensive nature of the student experience” (Price, 2008, p. 29).

Agliata and Renk (2008) conducted a correlational study, which examined the role of parents in relation to college student expectation discrepancies, communication reciprocity, and adjustment. Their population consisted of 69 male and 105 female freshman and sophomore college students at a southeastern university. Agliata and Renk (2008) also used a subsample of the students’ mothers and fathers. The results of the study determined that higher expectation discrepancies between the students and parents resulted in lower reports of self-worth from the student. Parents have high expectations, and the student may feel those expectations are unrealistic. If the student does not meet the parent’s expectations, they may feel inadequate or unable to be successful. This may cause the student to regress and rely more on the parent to satisfy the parent. “Regression results also indicated that expectation discrepancies and college students’ perceptions of communication reciprocity are important predictors of college students’ self-worth and adjustment” (Agliata & Renk, 2008, p. 967).

Agliata and Renk (2008) suggested that “teaching assertive communication skills to college students and their parents may serve as a means of promoting positive outcomes for college students” (p. 967). The authors proposed students create their own goals, express these goals to their parents, and the parents should express realistic expectations based on those goals rather than their personal expectations. Taking these suggestions with the suggestions made by other authors, this could be something student affairs professionals express or teach to students and their parents before they arrive on campus.

Theoretical Framework

Self-Authorship Theory. Marcia Baxter Magolda determined epistemological development is connected to the development of one’s own sense of self and, therefore a person’s relationships with others. Baxter Magolda (2008) defined self-authorship as “the internal capacity to define one’s beliefs, identity, and social relations” (p. 269). Baxter Magolda (2012) theorized that “development evolves from relying primarily on external sources for meaning making, through relying on a mix of external and internal sources to relying primarily on internally generated meaning making” (p.420). A person must construct an authentic, internal sense of self to maintain healthy, interdependent relationships with others (Baxter Magolda, 2007). Furthermore, respecting others will only come once you are able to respect yourself. Self-authorship and understanding who one is will enhance interactions and relationships with others in a more honest and open way (Evans et al., 2010). A person must explore their personal values, make sense of past experiences, and develop their own path to move toward self-authorship (Evans et al., 2010). “These perspectives demonstrate that self-authorship of identity, relationships, and knowledge are necessary for mature adult decision making, interdependent relationships, and effective citizenship (Baxter Magolda, 2007, p.72).

Baxter Magolda (2007) determined some individuals encounter self-authorship during their college experience or earlier, while others may continue to rely on external authority until later in their adult life. “College is a prime context in which to introduce provocative experiences, portray accurately the complexity of adult life, and guide students through the developmental transformations that lead toward inner wisdom (Baxter Magolda, 2007, p. 73). Furthermore, “promoting self-authorship during college is a realistic goal” (p.73).

Baxter Magolda (2007) stated that many college environments do not possess the correct formula or experiences for students to develop self-authorship, or an internal belief system, so they learn to rely on external factors when making decisions, forming beliefs, and establishing identity. Baxter Magolda developed the Learning Partnerships Model (LPM) to understand and “guide learning and development toward self- authorship” (p. 70). Baxter Magolda’s LPM relies on student development, campus partnerships, and exposure to diverse perspectives rather than knowledge to help students develop self-authorship. In 2003, Student Affairs professionals at California State University, Northridge, began to implement developmental learning outcomes for each sector of the division, thus creating an inclusive divisional approach to furthering student development that will result in advanced learning outcomes (Baxter Magolda, 2007). The University of Michigan created a committee to examine student climate and began to consider the role and effect of intercultural maturity. Student Affairs divisions are fostering campus partnerships with offices outside of their own to focus on holistic student development (Baxter Magolda, 2007). “Research illustrates that introducing college students to complexity and enabling them to deal with it meaningfully promotes self-authorship” (Baxter Magolda, 2007, p. 73). Through innovative campus partnerships, the end goal is to develop “a mature sense of identity and mature interdependent relations with diverse others” (Baxter Magolda, 2007, p. 76).

Self-Determination Theory. Ryan and Deci's Self-Determination Theory, introduced in 1985, suggests that an individual is motivated to grow and develop when their psychological need for competence, connection, and autonomy is fulfilled. "The fullest representations of humanity show people to be curious, vital, and self-motivated. At their best, they are agentic and inspired, striving to learn, extend themselves, master new skills, and apply their talents responsibly" (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 68). In this theory, competence refers to the act of learning new skills to accomplish goals. Connection is the sense of belonging and community, and autonomy is the sense of control over actions, behaviors, and decisions. Additionally, Self-Determination Theory assumes there are two types of motivation: intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation.

Ryan and Deci (2000) defined intrinsic motivation as "the inherent tendency to seek out novelty and challenges, to extend and exercise one's capacities, to explore, and to learn" (p. 7). Intrinsic motivation is autonomously driven by values, ethics, and interests. Ryan and Deci (2000) determined intrinsic motivation can be interrupted by non-supportive, external factors. These external factors can include "tangible rewards, threats, deadlines, directives, pressured evaluations and imposed goals" (p. 70). Furthermore, external factors may come from parents. A self-determined individual believes possess responsibility and accountability for their actions, and they are internally driven to master skills and accomplish goals. People whose motivation is self-authored have more interest, passion, and confidence, which results in better performance, creativity, and persistence (Ryan & Deci, 2000). People strive for independence and autonomy as the outcome is more satisfying (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Ryan and Deci (2000) examined previous studies and found that parents who support their student to be more independent also have students who are more intrinsically motivated.

Extrinsic motivation, opposite of intrinsic motivation, is driven through controlled, external factors such as praise, fear of disappointment, approval of others, awards, and prizes (Ryan & Deci, 2008). If a person lacks self-determination, they may blame others for their failures and shortcomings, only attempt things for external approval, and may take on the role of a victim (Ryan & Deci, 2008). Ryan and Deci (2000) identify two factors, which may diminish motivation and create alienation and inauthenticity. These are an individual's immediate social and developmental environments. Lack of support for competence, autonomy, and connection in either of these environments can contribute to an individual's alienation and ill-being (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Additionally, many external factors such as fear of disappointment, desire for approval, and obtaining rewards may lead back to the student's parents. Understanding the factors which promote and diminish motivation and positive experience are relevant to parents and educators concerned with development because "it speaks to the conditions that promote the assimilation of both information and behavioral regulations" (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 76).

Summary

Opposite of *in loco parentis*, the parent of today's college student is on the front lines of the experience. Parents are knowledgeable as they, too, went to college. They have high expectations of the institution *and* staff as tuition is expensive and they place a high priority on value. They are involved and would solve every challenge their student faced at college if they could. When these parental characteristics are combined, the term helicopter parent emerges due to the parent hovering and arriving almost immediately in emergency or problematic situations.

The idea of helicopter parenting is met with mixed reviews as some believe it is a positive attribute while others believe it is overbearing and only hinders the student's autonomy and ability to make decisions. This review of literature revealed that parents' may be involved in

attempt to protect their student from negative situations they once experienced and help their student to remain as stress free as possible. This review of literature also discovered that a parent's overbearingness can impact the student's ability to contribute to groups, cope with change, adapt to new environments, and resolve conflict. The student may experience lower self-esteem and lack confidence to make decisions, and, in turn, learn to solely rely on their parent(s). A need for communication among parents, students, and student affairs professionals is a theme present in many of the studies reviewed. Findings indicated that parents rely on communication with their student to remain attached, but the communication may not always result in positive effects.

The task of making each stakeholder happy can be a difficult and slippery slope for student affairs professionals. Desired outcomes may differ between involved parties and deviate from standard policy and practice, and one may simply be unable to satisfy all. Literature suggests that student affairs professionals educate students and parents about student development for everyone to possess a better understanding of policies and practices. This process would also enable student affairs professionals to communicate realistic expectations of the college experience, environment, and provide information on campus resources. Student development is the backbone of student affairs, and it is important that institutions, students, and parents work together in a partnership to assist the student in their development rather than constantly molding policies, practices, and communication to whatever makes the student happy at that moment.

While helicopter parenting, consumer attitudes, and student entitlement in higher education may be familiar concepts for student affairs professionals, research on these topics is quite limited. More literature exists on helicopter parenting than the strategies student affairs

professionals use in attempt to balance the student/consumer sense of entitlement with student development.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This chapter will outline the methodological framework that will be used to determine what perceptions student affairs professionals have regarding their role on campus and to understand what expectations they have of themselves in relation to the changing dynamic of the consumer and student entitlement. This study will utilize qualitative analysis to determine findings. The researcher believed a qualitative study would build to the current body of research, which lack perspective and explanation from student affairs professionals in different areas of a university campus.

Design of Study

According to Yin (2011), qualitative research provides an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding through a participant's self-reported experiences. The researcher did not want participants to minimize or manipulate their experiences to fit pre-determined responses created by the researcher. Rather, the researcher wanted participants the opportunity to explain their experiences in their own words (Yin, 2011). The researcher interviewed six participants. The interviews will be conducted virtually using Zoom software. The interviews will be private with only the researcher and participant present. The researcher will utilize a semi-structured interview format, which will consist of open-ended and closed-ended questions (Appendix B).

Participants

There were 6 participants in total. The participants are employed at the same midwestern university. The researcher purposefully selected these participants due to the areas where they are employed. The researcher wanted the participants to cover multiple divisions of student affairs. The researcher contacted the participants via email (Appendix A).

For purpose of anonymity, the participants are not named. Rather, each participant is identified by the area in which they work. The participants are placed in an order as to when these professionals may first interact or provide services to the student.

Office of Admissions. The first participant is a full-time professional in the Office of Admissions. At the time of the interview, this participant was near the conclusion of her first year with the office. For purpose of this study, I referred to this participant throughout the study as “Admissions”.

New Student and Family Programs. This participant has worked in her current office for five years. For purpose of this study, I referred to this participant throughout the study as “Orientation”.

Academic Advising. This participant has worked at this institution in Academic Advising for 23 years. For purpose of this study, I referred to this participant throughout the study as “Advising”.

Housing and Dining. This participant has worked at this institution and in the Housing and Dining Office for over 26 years. For purpose of this study, I referred to this participant throughout the study as “Housing”.

Health and Counseling Services. This participant has worked in the health sector of this university for over 25 years. At this institution, Health and Counseling Services houses several offices, which include the Health Education Resource Center, Student Insurance, Medical Clinic, and Counseling Clinic. For purpose of this study, I referred to this participant throughout the study as “Health and Counseling Services”.

Fraternity & Sorority Programs. This participant has worked in Greek Life for five years. For purpose of this study, I referred to this participant throughout the study as “Greek Life”.

Research Site

The research site for this study is a mid-sized, rural Midwestern university. The university offers Bachelor's, Master's, and Specialist degrees. The enrollment is 7,415 students. The town in which the university is located has 20,464 residents. The researcher interviewed each participant virtually via Zoom. The researcher conducted the interviews on campus in their private office space, which was a natural environment. The participants were interviewed in their offices on campus or from their home offices, which provided a natural, secure, and confidential environment for each interview.

Instrumentation

The researcher utilized a semi-structured interview style (Yin, 2011). The researcher sought to help participants feel comfortable during the interview as some of the questions would be open-ended and elicit responses from personal experiences. The interview questions were pre-determined, although some questions were built upon during the interview depending on the participant's response. This type of interview style allowed the researcher to ask the participant for clarification and invite the participant to provide more detail if their initial response was less developed.

Data Collection

All participants received an informed consent form (Appendix B) via email. At the beginning of the interview, the researcher verbally informed participants that they can terminate the interview at any point. The interviews were conducted using Zoom during a two-week period in the Spring 2021 semester. The researcher and participants used headphones and/or microphones and webcams to communicate with each other. All participants provided verbal and written consent to allow the researcher to record the interview via Zoom software. The

recordings were used during the transcription and coding process. Interviews lasted between 40 to 65 minutes with each participant.

Treatment of Data

The researcher used the electronic recording files to transcribe the interviews after all interviews were conducted, and the transcriptions were used to analyze the responses of each participant. The researcher utilized a five-phased cycle of analyzing qualitative data as suggested by Yin (2011). This phases in this cycle include (1) compiling, (2) disassembling, (3) reassembling and arraying, (4) interpreting, and (5) concluding (Yin, 2011). The researcher began the first phase by compiling and sorting the transcriptions to create a database on an Excel spreadsheet. During the second stage, “disassembling”, the researcher broke down the data into smaller fragments and assigned a code to certain terms, themes, similar experiences, and feelings (Yin, 2011). In effort to streamline the data, the researcher examined, refined, and disassembled the data fragments and codes multiples times. After the disassembling phase was complete, the researcher began the third phase, which consisted of reassembling the data into themes or arrays to see broader themes and outline the data analysis (Yin, 2011). “You can increase the accuracy and robustness of your work by giving close attention to constant comparisons, to negative or contrary cases, and to rival thinking” (Yin, 2011, p. 198). After repeating this phase multiple times, the researcher began phase 4, which included interpreting the data to construct the overall narrative of the participants, or the findings. During the final stage, concluding, the researcher determined her conclusions based on her interpretation of the findings.

The names of the participants and any other identifying information was omitted to maintain confidentiality. The recordings of the interviews and the transcriptions were stored on an external hard drive, which only the researcher has access to. Per Institutional Review Board

(IRB) policy, the researcher will dispose of all files within three years of initial collection. The informed consent forms, which participants completed prior to the interviews, were not stored in the same electronic file as the data. This was done to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of all participants.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS

The purpose of this study is to gain perspective of how student affairs professionals are managing the changing dynamic of the student. The researcher seeks to explore how student affairs professionals uphold the expectation that the “customer is always right” while encouraging students’ development. This chapter explored the participants’ responses when asked about their current role as a Student Affairs professional, their unique experiences, and interactions with students and parents. By exploring these experiences through the lens of each participant and understanding the themes that arose, the reader will have a deeper understanding of the expectations of student affairs professionals and how they balance and cope with the changing dynamic of the student.

Role of Student Affairs Professionals

Participants were asked what their current role is and what their own expectations are of the work they do. Participants were also asked if their role has changed over time, and if so, how it has changed. Responses were evaluated by what participants said, and then evaluated to compare similarities and differences. The participants shared a common goal to serve and satisfy students, but the timing as to when they primarily serve a student became foundation for the variances. Admissions, Orientation, and Advising typically interact with student first and in some cases only temporarily. A theme emerged from these participants: they are to solve any issue which may delay or prevent a student from fully committing to campus, in other words, student enrollment. Once the student is committed, these participants hand the students off to the participants who interact or may service students for a longer duration or later in their college experience. These participants included Housing, Health Service, and Greek Life. A theme

emerged from these participants as well. The role of these participants is to “put out fires”, facilitate development, help students take initiative for their own success, and remain enrolled in other words, student retention. This chapter will develop both themes more thoroughly based on the participants’ responses.

Get students to commit to campus

Admissions shared that her main objective is to recruit students to campus and counsel them through the admissions process. She stated she wants students to understand what their experience is going to look like on campus and reach her enrollment goals. “There’s very much a push to work hard based off of enrollment goals.” At the institution in this study, the Office of Admissions is categorized under Enrollment Management, but Admissions stated that a lot of what she does aligns with student affairs. “You’re still asking how can we support you, what can we do to help you? But it’s also setting them up to understanding they’re going to have to figure these things out when they get into school.” Admissions stated that task is generally put on other offices in Student Affairs. Those offices are “more like we’re here to help you, this is how I’m going to support you. I empathize with your situation and those types of things which you get a piece of here (Admissions). I’m doing those things as well, but I’m really doing them with enrollment numbers in mind”.

Admissions shared that her time with students is not very long. “Once they go through orientation and get registered for classes, they’re out of my hands and they’re an enrolled student. I do have students that come back periodically to ask me questions, help with FAFSA and things like that, but typically it’s very short term that I’m working with students”.

When asked about her role on campus, Orientation stated, “I deal with all things orientation, new students coming in, transitioning to campus, and we do the family weekend and

all of the extra activities with that”. When asked about her interactions with students, she stated it mainly occurs on orientation day. “Their main concern is registering for classes. Once they meet with their advisor, they must register for classes, and that’s pretty much the extent of it (interaction)”. She also part of her role is to appear excited, help students find connections and ways to relate to others on campus. “We always have to be perky and very excited about things. I think that’s a big expectation – that we’re always having the fanfare”.

Advising works with all students including incoming freshman students on orientation day. “We do an orientation for them and help them get registered for the fall semester. We also help them figure out what major they want to major in. It’s in conjunction with career services”. Advising will meet with her caseload of students until they are advised under their major. When asked about her role as it relates to student affairs, she shared that while her office is not located in the student affairs division, her role does share similarities. “I feel like student affairs is the more social side of things. It’s in that realm of watching over the students and making sure that everybody’s “ok” and feeling part of the campus”. Once students meet with her a couple times and feel comfortable with her, she shared that they begin to share stories of their experiences, successes, and challenges on campus. “I had two different students tell me that they don’t really know anybody, and they eat alone. I looked at their schedules and they happened to have a class together, so I let each of them know and told them maybe they should go do something together. They ended up being friends. If I can help them be happier on campus, I want to”.

Get students to stay on campus

When asked about self-expectations, Housing stated “we’re making sure that we’re doing everything we can to help our students succeed in and outside of the classroom and overseeing staff”. Housing elaborated and stated “really, my job right now seems to be more of putting out

fires. People in the halls joke around about how I tend to have a revolving door, and it does seem that way”. Housing stated that one of the overall goals, for him in housing, is to help students develop people skills. “The academic affairs side is to help Bobby become the best meteorologist he can be, but it’s our job in student affairs to help with personal wellness, people skills, and when things get tough, how do you persevere and become resilient?”. Housing continued “I think what we’re really trying to do is listen to the student where they’re at and trying to push the right buttons to help make students more successful. If we can get it done in a way where they take the initiative, or they see the light in terms of what they need to do, then that’s where the true learning begins”.

Health and Counseling Services said “I think we exist to promote and facilitate the learning and development that occurs outside the classroom whether it’s in a residence hall, through an extracurricular activity or organizations, or it’s just through one-on-one coaching and mentoring”. Greek Life stated his role and position centers around 25 social fraternities and sororities, which has a community of more than 450. “We play a big part in extra-curricular and leadership development”. His role includes resource referral to areas like Academic Advising, the Writing Center, tutoring, and Health and Counseling services. When asked about self-expectations, Greek Life stated “my expectation is to be supportive of our students and provide authentic relationships and resources with our students”. He shared that in some of his conversations, he takes on a counseling or parent-like role. Immediately following this statement, Greek Life added “but I make sure that I also support myself and create some boundaries”. He added “at the end of the day, our job is to support our students outside of the classroom and within extracurricular activities”.

Changes Experienced by Student Affairs Professionals

The participants were asked about the changes they experienced through their roles in student affairs. Furthermore, participants discussed how these changes have affected their interactions and the expectations others have of them. Unprompted, three participants: Advising, Housing, and Health and Counseling Services discussed the effects of a higher education budget crisis in 2015 and how that has caused various changes in their professional roles. To note, these participants have been employed at their current institution for more than 23 years and up to 26 years. The other three participants, Admissions, Orientation, and Greek Life began their careers in higher education during and after the budget crisis in 2015. The overarching effects of the budget crisis are discussed and followed by the other various changes experienced by participants.

Effects of budget crisis

Health and Counseling Services shared that a state budget crisis in 2015 had a direct impact on the institution he and the other five participants work at. In 2015, the state governor proposed a budget decrease of 31.8% for higher education. The governor and legislature began negotiating a new 2015-2016 budget, however, a decision still was not made halfway through the fiscal year. During that time, state universities had to seek ways to cover operating costs (Woodhouse, 2016). As a result of the budget crisis, freshman student enrollment declined across the state (Rhodes, 2017). Fewer enrolled students meant the university was receiving fewer tuition dollars to help fund services across campus. Health and Counseling Services shared that six years later, higher education is still affected, and so are the employees. Health and Counseling Services said “we don’t have increased revenue. We don’t have increased students

bringing more student dollars, and we're pretty much against raising student fees out of fear that will push students away. There are no easy answers".

When asked about the changes in his role, Health and Counseling Services said "there's a lot of work that has been consolidated into one person". Prior to the budget crisis, his position was spread between three separate people. "I think the reality of it is the institution is doing its best to deal with what resources it has. It's expected more out of its employees as a result because there are far fewer positions available". Health and Counseling Services shared that with these changes, his role has become more strategic and business focused with less one-on-one student contact. "I see myself as the "Wizard of Oz" behind the curtain trying to make things happen".

Sharing a similar sentiment, Orientation shared her job now includes responsibilities outside of her primary office, the New Student and Family Programs Office. "We're juggling different hats. Regardless of when it is, we always have something going on and there's never really downtime for me". She expressed this is a challenge and she knows many others are faced with the same challenge. Concept of time was an issue Health and Counseling Services elaborated on regarding changes that he has experienced. He recalled a time when upper administration emailed him and his colleagues after midnight. "I remember thinking if this is what they are doing, that's really what they expect of us".

When asked about the changes, Housing said "25 years ago, we had high occupancy. The institution was busting at the seams of students". He continued "if you had to tell a student no, you were usually supported because your budget wasn't so tight that you were dependent upon that money. Now, it's very different".

Furthermore, Housing said:

Leadership and the whole landscape has changed. Even the state support and finances has changed and even lessened. It is really hard to keep a student around that you don't keep happy. I think there is pressure to make it work one way or another and to do that, you got to really keep your customer satisfied.

Advising said, "we do not have the resources to help all of the students who need help". She went on to say "when you are admitting students, who need extra help and aren't really prepared, and then you don't have enough of what they need, it's a huge problem". Health and Counseling Services asked "we are getting students here but are we investing in our infrastructure enough to keep them here?". He explained that from his perspective, the institution does not want to increase student fees, because the monetary increase could affect enrollment and retention. With less revenue from fees, a hiring freeze occurs, which means there are less staff to serve students, and then a student must go on a waitlist to receive services like the medical and counseling clinics. "Have we lost students because we have a waitlist, and they can't get into the medical clinic or to the counseling clinic? Yeah, probably". He elaborated "even if I had twice as many counselors, we wouldn't be able to do it (serve all students)".

To preface a situation Health and Counseling Services recently had at an enrollment and retention meeting, he explained that students may receive a hold on their student account if they do not complete certain requirements like turning in their immunization records or complete an online alcohol prevention and education training program. A hold on a student account can often prevent a student from registering for classes. Health and Counseling Services said he feels administration has an expectation that staff should do more to prevent these student holds. Health and Counseling Services shared that his staff typically send email reminders to students who have yet to complete the requirements. "We're emailing weekly to their email accounts,

and we're being told that's not enough. You need to be emailing their personal accounts". He elaborated "our policy says they should be checking their email, but because now we're expected to go the extra mile, we have to do both".

Health and Counseling Services said text message reminders was brought up as a suggestion at the meeting.

We're expected to go an extra step beyond what we're doing now to try and reduce the number of holds, and that's fine. It's just the amount of time and resources it takes to do that. We're not getting additional money, we're not getting additional resources, so it prevents us from being able to do something else.

He posed this thought with a question:

It helps one outcome by getting more people enrolled, but does it help keep and retain students that are here because we're having to take away from other alcohol prevention programs or mental health programs because the resources have to be allocated differently?

The researcher asked Health and Counseling Services if he believes student retention is a driving factor behind these additional expectations. Health and Counseling Services said "I think it's a strong motivating factor". He continued "there is this mentality we need to do everything and anything to get numbers". Later, he explained "we've always been student centric, and student centered, but it's become a lot more consumer driven". Health and Counseling Services stated "I think we are so hungry for students that there is this mentality that we need to do everything and anything to get the numbers". Health and Counseling Services stated he believes there is an expectation is to be "all in for the students", but he questions "with what parameters?". He said:

I feel like there was a sudden and dramatic shift. Early on, it was do not cater to the helicopter parents. Set boundaries. Teach the parents. And then, it was like an overnight switch was flicked. It was like, okay this is how it's going to be. You might as well work with the parents. Give them what they want.

Unprepared students with complex needs

When asked about student changes, Health and Counseling Services said a lot has changed environmentally and culturally since he started in student affairs 21 years ago. “We’re getting a lot of lower income students and first-generation students. We’ve always had that, but it seems like it’s been a lot more”. He also stated more students are working on and off-campus than before. “As a result, I think our students’ priorities have changed”. He believes students are more focused on the outcome and getting a degree more than the process. Advising shared a similar response. Advising said that because there are fewer students, she has more time to meet with students, but that extra time is needed more now than before. Complex students are bringing more complex needs to campus. Advising said:

Back in the day, I used to have 400 students at a time, so it had to be a quicker session.

We tend to spend a little bit more time with our students now, because we have the time to do it, thankfully. The students we’re getting now are much needier emotionally and just, overall. A lot of them are first generation and they don’t have anyone in their family that can really help them understand what to expect in college. They have a lot more questions and anxiety about being here.

Advising was asked to elaborate on her answer and she stated she believes many students are not ready or prepared for college. She questioned if part of this unpreparedness is a result of high school failing to speak with students about expectations in college. She believes that

unpreparedness paired with students who need extra help and support and a lack of resources on campus is a large deterrent for students' success. "You have to help students understand that they have to seek out help when they need it and many of them won't do it. They think they will figure it out or they will start doing better when, they may just not be ready to be here".

Advising said she often helps students figure out if they have enough points to receive a passing grade in a class, or if they know how to ask their professor for additional help, and often they seem lost. "They don't get it, because they're used to their high school teachers hovering over them". She said when she meets with a student who failed classes their first semester, she will try and figure out what the problem was and what was deterring their success. "I'm just like what is it? What happened? Were you not taking class seriously or is that you really did try, and the class just isn't in your range?".

Handholding paired with a sense of entitlement

Advising said it is common for a student to drop out if they cannot figure out what they are good at and what they want to do. She tries to help students understand that their goals and abilities do not have to fit into one box. "So many students end up failing out and leaving, and it's because they just didn't know how to even consider what they might be good at or consider other avenues than what they told their mom they were going to do". Advising said students must at least try, and if they cannot succeed in a certain subject, it is fine, and she can help them find something they enjoy and can be successful in. She said "I try to explain that they don't have to have this certain major just because someone told them to do that. Pick the major you are good at, you're going to like, and that's going to get you where you want to be". Once students commit to a major, they meet with the advisor in that major. She said the department advisor typically has many responsibilities other than advising, and that person may not have always

been an advisor, so appointments with students are not as in depth as some students need. “We have students come back to us saying can you please help me, they’re not. I’m so confused”.

Advising said:

I think some departments think it’s the student’s responsibility, and really it is, but especially with this generation in the last 5-10 years, they need a lot more handholding. We try to teach students how to be their own advocate and be able to navigate things themselves, but a lot of them can’t. What do we want to do? Just let them fail, let them flail around and then graduate on time because we’re not willing to put in extra time with them?

Like Advising’s statement about handholding, Admissions shared some students reach out to her with the intention of her completing certain requirements on their behalf. She said she will help them, but she wants students to understand she has a limit, and she has boundaries. She said “I think a lot of students expect that I will walk them through each step. It’s their responsibility, and I try to make that really clear early on”. Admissions shared a specific example. She said some students want her to get their transcripts from a previous institution, and that is not something she can do. “I think their expectation is that I can resolve that for them when I can’t even call another university and ask any information about them”. She continued “I think there’s a disconnect between what they think I can do for them. I would love for them to deal with the issue at hand, but then they get mad at me for requiring a transcript”.

Admissions said some students will call and expect she remembers them by voice and remembers exactly where they are in their application and admission process, but it is difficult because she has over 150 students. She said she loves the fact that students feel they have a

relationship with her, and she can recall the student if she has time to review her notes, “but there are some unreasonable expectations”.

Advising said she encounters similar expectations along with a sense of entitlement from students. In her realm of work, she shared some students want her to make decisions and do things for them rather than explore their options themselves. “They have to figure it out on their own and not have someone tell them”. She encourages students to visit Career Services to explore their options, but she believes not as many students go that should. She said “they don’t want to do another step. They don’t want another meeting.

Similarly, Health and Counseling Services said “at what point is it my responsibility to push and prod them to get stuff done and turn stuff in, and at what point in time is it their responsibility to get things done in a timely manner, so that way they can graduate?”. Health and Counseling Services shared it is not uncommon for a student to decide they want to enroll at the university the weekend before classes start, and staff will be at the university on Sunday “to move mountains to get them in and registered”. Health and Counseling Services posed a question to the researcher and said “at what point are we hurting the students because we’re absorbing all the responsibilities? What are we teaching our students?”

Orientation shared that some students come to orientation day to register for classes assuming that because they are an honor student or an athlete, they deserve better classes. “There’s a few students who think they don’t need to have 8AM classes, or they don’t need to do something because of whatever reason”. The researcher asked Orientation how she responds to those expectations. Orientation said she will explain that all students must go through the same process to select classes. She said “They get it. They just have that entitlement that they think they deserve something because they’re an athlete for example”. She recalls another similar

situation where a student had a preferred schedule set in their mind, and they became frustrated when it was not working out, and the student ended up with an 8am class.

Greek Life stated students often come to him when they receive news they do not like, and they are seeking a new, better outcome from him. As a result, he will have discussions about autonomy, resiliency, and accountability. He said his most thorough discussions happen with students in leadership positions. He said “I do it because I care for them as a human being, not a product of the institution”. When asked about student expectations, Housing said:

I do think that they expect me to give them what they want. Of course, I want to give them what they want. It makes my life easier too, but when I give them what they want and its inconsistent with how we treated other students, that’s the problem. And then it really becomes more a problem with that student feels like they’re being either oppressed or discriminated against because they’re told no. Maybe in their life, because of their sense of entitlement and parents’ involvement, they haven’t been told no very often.

Housing said “they (students) can’t constantly be relying on another person to be successful. We got to help them find that from within”.

Increased student mental health concerns

Housing said one of the biggest changes he has seen with students is mental health. Four participants brought up mental health without prompting. The participants who did not discuss mental health were Admissions and Orientation, who both stated they do not have much interaction with students beyond the early stages of their college career. Housing shared that when he first started his career in student affairs over 25 years ago, he had maybe one student per semester express suicidal ideology. “If we go a week on this campus or even a day without a report of self-harm or suicidal ideology, then that’s a good day and sometimes it’s a miracle”. He

mentioned an article he read in 2018 or 2019, which said the incoming freshman class that year was the most psychologically distressed incoming freshman class ever to enter higher education.

Housing went on to say:

You cannot go to a class and be focused on what the faculty member is teaching you when you're stressed out about whether you're going to be able to pay your bill next month or you haven't eaten in a couple days or you ran out of medication or you didn't take your medication. Those are several things we did not deal with 20-25 years ago.

In his position, Housing tries to help these students cope, and coping is a core issue. He shared that in attempt to combat some of the issues today's freshman are experiencing, the institution has implemented a freshman connection program. This program provides freshman students with an upper-class mentor who can help them transition, share resources, be a friend and help them succeed on campus. The institution is also proposing an idea to increase living learning communities, which will also require additional staff. He shared that a colleague of his, who worked to create the freshman connection program, told him that future students may need a program like this beyond freshman year. Housing elaborated and said "they're going to need more hands-on assistance in order to be successful whether it's from a mentor or a residence life professional, and that's something we didn't need as much staff to do 20-25 years ago". He believes this is needed due to the increase of mental health and coping issues and a fear of talking to others in person versus electronically.

Technology created a socially anxious, microwave society

Housing feels that technology has changed relationships and how today's college students interact daily. More so, Housing said he thinks we are dealing with less equipped students than we were years ago. "I just see so many students today who are afraid to pick up

the phone and talk to somebody. I think there's a lot more social anxiety now among our college and high school students than there was 20-25 years ago". He recalls his experience in college and said he had no problem picking up the phone to order a pizza, but now, his 18-year-old son is uncomfortable with that task. "There's a look of fear on his face, and that's sad".

Health and Counseling Services said he believes student affairs professionals have bred a culture of being student centered, always responding, and always being available, which has created boundary issues. "Whether it's an email, text message, or phone call, I think it's very easy to pick up the phone and respond whether it's during the workday, evening, weekend, or at wedding of family member". He went on to say "I think with the changes and advances in technology, these unspoken expectations that we're always available have just increased the stress of our staff". Housing said:

We really live in this microwave society where everyone wants their problem solved, just like that. And while that is happening, you also see a lot of colleges and universities going through budget struggles, and their amount of staff resources have decreased. So, everybody wants things done and resolved as quickly as possible, and sometimes not with the long-term life lesson that is kept in mind. I think that is another significant issue that we need to pay attention to in student affairs. Sometimes the quick resolution of these issues is truly not what is best for that student.

Greek Life shared the same sentiment regarding technology. He discussed how technology effects students' expectations of student affairs staff. "I think students are used to getting information right then and there, and I think once that happens, they expect that from other individuals as well". He shared this can be challenging as a professional, and he must remind students that he cannot be readily available all hours of the day. "I have to remind

students that just because you sent me an email five minutes ago doesn't mean I read it and will respond right then and there. I have other responsibilities too”.

Housing said “there is a perception from students and from administration that student affairs professionals fix the problem. They don't care how, just fix it and fix it in a way where the student is satisfied and stay here”. Housing stated that because of this idea of a microwave society and technology, student affairs professionals must be much more prepared to pivot quickly through certain situations. He shared that at one time, if a student passed away, he and his team could take some time and be methodical to make sure the right people received the information about the death at the right time, and that it could be released appropriately. He said:

Eight or 10 years ago, we had a student pass away from natural causes. I remember the coroner had not even made the call to the parents yet, and I was standing in the front yard of the student's residence, and I looked at my phone and saw on Twitter that a former staff member shared condolences to the family on the death of their son. People find out bad news in bad ways now.

Interactions with Students and Parents

Participants were asked about their interactions with students and parents. They were asked what prompts those interactions, what their needs or wants are, and if students and parents have expectations of the resource or the support they provide. They were also asked to discuss their perceptions of the student-parent relationship.

Parents are more involved than ever before

Orientation said when she interacts with parents, it is typically when they call the office to ask what their student should bring to orientation. They may ask what orientation entails and

what will happen that day. When asked how parents and students interact on orientation day, she said “Sometimes there are helicopter parents that want to do everything for their student, and then there’s some of parents or family members who are like you can do it; it’s your college experience”. The researcher asked Orientation if there is anything that indicates to her that someone is a helicopter parent. She said at orientation check-in, they ask each student what their name is, and some parents will answer for the student. Additionally, she said orientation staff tells parents and students that only students will be going into their advising appointments. She said it is explicitly stated, yet some parents still ask to attend. “When there’s parents that always try to budge and say that they want to do it (advising appointment), we always say that we (students) do it as a group, but they can always look things over after the student is done at the end of the day”. Orientation said that once they get the student away from the family member for the actual orientation portion of the day, the students and parents relax, and the student takes charge of what they want.

Advising said parents will call asking for their student’s pin number to register for classes. Advising said she will tell the parent the student must give them that information. She will tell the parent to have the student reach out to her and she can talk with the student about registration. “I feel like they think that since they’re paying for it, they should be able to see this and that, but you got to ask your student about it. I’m a helicopter parent. I get it”.

Housing disclosed he is a parent, and he talked about challenges he has faced with his own teenager. He recalled his college experience and how he did not have a cell phone or the internet. He had to figure things out for himself. Now, when his teenager faces a challenge or problem, the teen has technology and parents to rely on. “That is the problem. We’re supposed to be developing critical thinking skills. Not immediately going to Google or asking mom and

dad what they answer is”. Housing said parents must teach their teenagers life skills and encourage them to do things for themselves, so they are able to be confident, independent, and successful in college and as an adult.

Greek Life said “parents are more involved now they they’ve ever been before”. He said most of his parent interactions occur around sorority and fraternity recruitment time. “It’s an upset parent or guardian because their daughter didn’t get into their chapter, or she didn’t understand what she was signing”. He said he then explains to the parent that he went over everything with the students three times before they signed anything and that their student is an adult and made the choice she wanted to make. When asked about the student-parent relationship, Greek Life said “we have the helicopter parents where they’re wanting to make every little decision for their child. I think those are the ones that I probably talked to the most”. Other times, he said “they want to understand the full scope, because sometimes they understand that their son or daughter may not be giving them the full story”.

Greek Life explained he has experienced a sense of entitlement during his interactions with parents. He explained that a mother called him upset that her daughter did not meet the GPA requirement for a chapter on campus. The mom explained she has another daughter who attends another university and is a part of a sorority who does not have GPA requirements, therefore her daughter at this institution should not be held to certain academic standards. The mother said if her daughter were to transfer out of this institution, she could go anywhere and be a part of the chapter. “Sometimes you just know right off the bat that you’re going to have a losing battle. The only thing you can do is explain the reason, policies, and procedures”.

Health and Counseling Services stated he believes there is an expectation is to be “all in for the students”, but he questions “with what parameters?”. He said:

I feel like there was a sudden and dramatic shift. Early on, it was do not cater to the helicopter parents. Set boundaries. Teach the parents. And then, it was like an overnight switch was flicked. It was like, okay this is how it's going to be. You might as well work with the parents. Give them what they want.

When asked about the student-parent relationship, Health and Counseling Services said "I think the students assume that the parents have taken care of it, and I think the parents assume the student has taken care of it. When things aren't getting taken care of, no one wants to accept responsibility". As a result, blame shifts, and frustrations grows. He shared:

I think some people really think that if I yell and scream loud enough, I'll get my way and I think there's a certain truth to that. People sit there and go okay, what are the benefits of me giving into this and we're allowing this? And what are the disadvantages of setting a firm boundary" And I'll be honest, I think sometimes it's far easier to sit there and say, yeah, I'm going to go ahead".

The researcher asked Health and Counseling Services why he thinks this is the case. He said:

The issue they bring to you is of grave importance to them. It's the most important thing going on in their life at that point in time. As an employee, you're juggling multiple things and there are probably other things you deem more important and more worrisome, but that doesn't minimize or negate the value that they're putting on their request or their agreements. To them, it's the most important thing.

Health and Counseling Services said he finds that parents may think they are the only one experiencing whatever it is they are experience, so he tries to help parents understand they are not the alone. He explains there is a precedent as to how he resolves the situation. "I cannot do anything differently for you than what I did for those that have come before you with these

grievances or these errors”. He said in some cases that works. “They realize okay, there is precedent. I’m not the only one. This is how they deal with it, and this is the outcome. I’m not going to get any special treatment. Those that aren’t happy with it, then that’s where it escalates”. Similarly, Housing said “Some of these institutional policies that were created 50 years ago exist for a reason. When the other side doesn’t want to listen to that reasoning at all, they just want you to do what they’re entitled to have. That’s when it gets ugly”.

Dissatisfaction is time consuming and results in threats to higher authority

Admissions and Housing shared that if a student is unhappy or unsatisfied with what they are told, they threaten to go to the president or someone up the line in hopes of receiving a different resolution. Orientation, Housing, Health and Counseling Services, and Greek Life recalled instances where parents threatened to go to the president.

Students. Regarding students threatening to call the president, Admissions said “it’s typically automatic if they’re not happy with me”. She continued “I tell the student that they are more than welcome to contact the president, and I will give my supervisor a heads up that a student called and said they are going to the president”. Housing shared a recent example of a dissatisfied student-employee. The student was unhappy with their supervisor about a work-related situation in the residence hall, and rather than speaking with another housing director, the student got a parent involved and went directly to the president. Housing said this situation could have provided an educational conversation with student about the importance of talking to one another, but he wasn’t given the opportunity. The president provided the student with their desired outcome.

When asked how he felt about that situation, Housing stated “unfortunately, it creates a little bit of mistrust for any president when they see issues coming to them from a certain area all

the time that should have never gotten there in the first place”. When asked about decision making and the challenges that exist, Housing shared that it has always been important to him to follow university policy and make sure his decision is ethical. Housing stated:

I want to make sure my response is ethical obviously, but also, I want to be able to look myself in the mirror the following day. I want to be able to be interviewed on *60 Minutes* and to explain my side of the story and people go “okay yep that makes sense. Based on what he knew at that time, that was the right decision to make.” But in the back of my mind, I am thinking about “okay so this student wants to continue to challenge this decision. Is it going to be supported at the vice president or president level?” You got to think about that. So, I always do what needs to be done in the beginning knowing that sometimes that won't get supported up the line.

Parents. Admissions, Greek Life, and Health and Counseling Services shared parents become especially frustrated or hostile when their concerns deal with money. Admissions said “I think emotional control kind of goes out the window especially when it comes to money”. Admissions said she will get phone calls from freshman parents who are seeking general information. In other instances, parents are calling stating their student wasn't admitted to the university, their student was not given enough financial aid, or their student did not get a scholarship, so they are seeking alternative methods to get them what they want. Admissions stated she does not have any tips, tricks, or alternative methods to provide at that time and it is out of her hands.

Greek Life stated that for him, the most common cause for parent frustration is when students do not meet GPA requirements yet want to participate in recruitment, which is against university policy. Greek Life stated the parents believe their son or daughter is entitled to

participate, because they pay chapter fees and dues, therefore the GPA requirement should not matter. He said parents will tell him their son or daughter did not understand the policy or was not aware of what the policy agreement meant when they signed it. Greek Life explains to parents that their son or daughter is an adult, and they are held responsible for what they sign.

Health and Counseling Services recalled a situation where a parent inquired about the medical withdrawal process prior to classes starting. For clarity, if a student is granted a medical withdrawal by Health and Counseling Services staff, the student may receive a refund on tuition and fees in certain situations. Medical withdrawals are not an immediate result of a student asking for one; there must be a precipitating event and all other criteria must be met through a process. Health and Counseling Services stated the mother was trying to make the decision as to where her student, who has mental health concerns, should live at home or on-campus for the year. Health and Counseling Services explained that he cannot make that decision. “There has to be something that happens and that says her condition has deteriorated from what it was at the beginning of the semester”. He explained the conversation was lengthy. “It took a while, because mom wanted me to say she could have a refund and I had to keep saying until we get to that situation and cross that bridge, I can’t promise anything”.

Coping Strategies for Student Affairs Professionals

All six participants were asked how they cope and bring balance to the changes and sets of expectations they discussed. Participants discussed their techniques, the importance of time management, the need for more work/life balance, a need for customer service skills, and training. The participants were also asked if they have suggestions for other student affairs professionals who may find themselves in similar situations and experiences.

Listen

When asked how they cope with expectations from parents and students, Health and Counseling Services and Housing had similar responses. Health and Counseling Services said he tries to make sure the students and parents feel heard. “If you just sit back and listen, that helps make them more satisfied”. He stated he has also learned to ask what the resolution is that they are seeking. “Sometimes what they want is far less than what I believe they want, and the resolutions can happen much easier and much quicker”. Housing said he first tries to listen to the student or parent and try to understand their perspective and where they are coming from. He then will present information from both sides to bridge an understanding. Health and Counseling Services said “I think it’s listening with an open mind, being empathetic so that way they’re heard, presenting the other side of the story, and what’s happened and what’s been done to try and help them do what needed to be done in the first place. Then setting some fair and firm boundaries”. Greek Life shared a similar response to Housing and Health Service. Regarding students, Greek Life said “all they want is to be heard and vent. I think if you say I hear you, I’m validating your feeling, but these are the policies and procedures that have been placed for a reason, and I hope you can understand that”.

Be real

Advising said she tells all new staff to be professional yet realistic with the student. “Don’t sugarcoat stuff to the student”. Admissions shared she feels it is important to always redirect back to the student and make sure the focus is the student rather than the parent. She said “I think it starts there with the language we’re using, the way we answer questions, and who we are answering to. We are here to serve the students not their parents. We always need to redirect back to the student”. She said when she has high school students come and visit the university

campus with their parents, she will try to ask the student questions. “They need to know how to talk to people and how to advocate for themselves”. She said communication skills need to be taught and encouraged by university staff.

Advising said the more of a relationship you have with a student, the more ‘real’ you can be. Advising stated:

I will say ‘why are you doing that, do you not want to be here? It’s easier to do that if you have built a relationship with a student and the student can trust you. It’s all about the student and them knowing you’re there for them and you’re going to help them in any way you can. The advice is to be open to the student and you don’t need to be super formal with everything. That’s not going to make a student comfortable. They’re not going to want to come and see you and talk to you about things outside of class or things that are going on with them. There’s so much more than just their academics going on in their life.

Greek Life said “the more authentic and honest you are with them, the better they’re able to cope with the answers and situations at hand”. Admissions said she thinks being upfront and honest about the expectations staff has for the students is important. “As student support staff, we need to prepare students. If a student is coming at you aggressively, tell them this isn’t appropriate. This isn’t productive and let’s talk about what will be productive and how we can work together”.

Additional training is needed

When asked if additional customer service-like training for student affairs professionals is needed to cope with the changing student and the student-parent consumer dynamic, five participants stated yes. One participant, Orientation, stated “I guess it wouldn’t hurt”. Health and

Counseling Services said “training has kind of gone by the wayside, but I would say we all need more customer service training. We need assertiveness training. We need to learn how to say no”. Housing said “I think about some of the things we talked about today and there is no training on these things. There’s no acknowledgement that the problem even exists”. He suggested training on how to deal with mental health issues, coping, and resiliency”. He said he knows solutions can be challenging, but he it is important. “There’s so many institutions that are struggling with numbers right now, and they just want the fire put out at that time. How do you put out the fire while trying to teach a lesson along the way? I think that is important”.

Encourage face-to-face communication

Advising and Housing discussed the importance of face-to-face communication and helping students talk to one another. Advising said “students have to learn to be more comfortable talking to each other and handling conflict outside of their phone. I try to teach and encourage that, but it has to be a group effort”. Housing said student professionals need to talk about the good and bad aspects of technology and how it can play a part in our lives. He urged the important of encouraging and teaching students how to communicate in person. He worries that if students do not learn how to make simple phone calls for themselves, they will have issues beyond college. “When you get in a work environment, how are you going to have the courage to ask questions to your boss or your colleagues?”.

Summary

The participants discussed the changes they have experienced in their roles as student affairs professionals. Through their dialogue, the researcher was able to gain a deeper understanding of the expectations of student affairs professionals and how they manage the changing dynamic of the student. In the next chapter, these findings will be discussed and

applied to Baxter Magolda's Self Authorship Theory and Ryan and Deci's Self-Determination Theory. Implications and suggestions for future research will also be discussed.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study is to gain perspective of how student affairs professionals are managing the changing dynamic of the student. The researcher seeks to explore how student affairs professionals uphold the expectation that the “customer is always right” while encouraging students’ development. Facets of this study included how students have changed and how those changes affect the role of the student affairs professional. This study also explored the student-parent relationship to determine if it impacts the role of the student affairs professional. This chapter examines the results and assess these topics to add to the limited body of research and discuss future suggestions for student affairs professionals to holistically satisfy the student in the short-term and long-term.

RQ 1: What are the participants’ perspectives on the role of student affairs professionals?

Through the participants’ responses to questions about their role as student affairs professionals, clear conclusions were drawn. Imagine these six participants as track athletes who complete their portion of the race and then pass the baton to the next athlete. The first three participants, Admissions, Orientation, and Advising, run sprint. They prioritize getting students to campus. They are expected to get students to fully commit to attending the university. The student’s time with each of these participants is usually brief. Admissions works with students to complete admissions requirements. Once students are admitted, the student meets with Orientation. Orientation is expected to appear excited and “perky” and provide fanfare to the new students and parents. At the end of a new student’s orientation, they meet with Advising, who is expected to help students find a major and enroll students in classes.

Admissions, Orientation, and Advising stated their expectations have not drastically changed throughout their time as working professionals. They did express ways students and parents have changed. Advising said “the students we are getting now are much needier, emotionally” and “we have a lot of students now that aren’t ready to be here”. This supported Couture et al. (2017) who found 72% of the participants believed today’s college student needs more guidance than those ten years ago. When asked about the role of the student affairs professional, all three of these participants stated that while their job does include some typical aspects of student affairs work like mentoring, supporting, and even counseling, they will most often refer the student to talk to staff in a different office if they are experiencing problems or crises that cannot be resolved quickly. Two of these participants specifically stated they will refer the student to Housing or Health and Counseling Services. Advising said “I refer students, who are having major issues, to other offices like Housing, Career Services, or even the counseling clinic. I don’t know that I can provide what they need”. These participants stated their expectations to get students committed to the university has remained the same, and that is to get the students committed to the university. Admissions said “my goal is to help students through the admissions process, and in doing that, help them understand this school is the best fit for them”.

After the first three participants get students accepted and enrolled, they pass the baton (the student) to the student affairs professionals who assist and service students on the back end of their college experience. In the analogy of track athletes, these staff members, Housing, Health and Counseling Services, and Greek Life, are marathon runners. The expectation of these professionals is to keep students happy and satisfied in the short and long-term, so they stay on campus. In other words, the expectation is to keep high student retention rates. While each of

these participants have certain expectations, these participants stated they must meet and pivot new challenges and obstacles as they appear throughout a college student's experience. Housing stated his role consists of "putting out fires" and other professionals joke about him having a revolving door. Health and Counseling Services said he feels like "The Wizard of Oz" and is tasked to "make things happen". Greek Life said he provides many resource referrals to the counseling clinic, and tutoring services, and has frequent discussions about autonomy, resiliency, and accountability.

Housing, Health and Counseling Services, and Greek Life expressed more obvious changes with expectations from students and administration. These participants stated they feel there is an expectation to do more. Because of decreased state and federal funding, they are expected to do whatever it takes to get and keep students whether it be by giving students what they want, lifting student holds, providing counseling-like conversations, or making the student an exception to a typical university policy or procedure. In summary, the two sets of expectations can be categorized by student enrollment where expectations seem more concrete, and student retention where expectations of staff has increased, and support has decreased.

RQ 2: What expectations do students have of student affairs professionals?

Overall, it was determined that students are needier and bring more complex challenges to campus than ever before; students expect to have their hand held. More first-generation students and students from lower socio-economic families are coming to campus less informed and less prepared, which requires additional support from staff. The participants acknowledge and welcome the task of providing extra support to students, but it does create challenges when they already feel over-extended. It was determined that additional resources are needed to satisfy

and service students in need. However, additional state and federal funding is needed to produce the needed, additional resources.

Participants blamed the lack of college preparation in K-12 schooling and over-involved, or hovering parents for some of the student changes. Four participants specifically used the term “helicopter parents”, and two participants self-identified themselves as “helicopter parents”. Participants believe this pairing makes students more dependent on others, like parents and/or staff, to accomplish tasks and problem solve. The participants’ responses regarding helicopter parenting support Hong and Coi (2020)’s findings, which suggested a parent’s interference with pre-existing or potential problems could send the message to their child that the parent is not confident in their own problem-solving capabilities and therefore the student feels a lack of self-control, which results in lower self-esteem. Participants’ responses also aligned with Karl and Peluchette (2016) and LeTrent (2013) who found that some believe the ‘hovering’ of helicopter parents can weaken a student’s development and hinder the transition from adolescence into adulthood. Advising said “I’m a helicopter parent, so I get it. I try not to overstep, because I see the impact it has on my child’s ability to think like an adult, but it can be hard to take a step back”. Overall, participants believe students are lacking motivation and autonomy, which creates unreasonable or unrealistic expectations of staff. These beliefs support with Baxter Magolda’s self-authorship theory.

Recall Magolda (2012) stated that a student begins their journey of self-authorship by relying on external sources. As the student gains confidence and independence, they begin to implore internal sources to create their own experience, or self-authorship. A student’s development is not evolving if they are not challenged to make meaning of their own thoughts, behaviors, and decisions. Rather, they are stuck in a cycle of depending on others. This aligns

with the participants' responses. They stated students expect them to complete tasks for them, solve problems, and remove any barriers which may hinder their advancement. If parents are unable to clear the path or solve the students' problem, the responsibility is put on staff rather than the students themselves. Admissions said "I've had students say to me "you're trying to get me to come to school here so, so now you must do these certain things for me", and I don't think that's helping them in the long run". Advising said "a student will email me and say "my mom went over my schedule, and she thinks I should do something different". I'll take that into consideration, but the change is rarely correct, and the student could have made the change on their own".

Similarly, Ryan and Deci's (2000) self-determination theory suggested that an individual is motivated to grow and develop when their psychological need for competence, connection, and autonomy is fulfilled. If a parent or staff member always fixes a student's problem, and the outcome is satisfactory, why would a student be motivated to figure it out for themselves? If a student relies solely on external sources, they do not see self-authorship as a need. Advising said her students do not want to be tasked with a longer process to complete or resolve something. Students are not challenged by obstacles if someone else solves it for them therefore, they are not determined or even implored to foster autonomy or self-authorship.

Housing discussed an example of an unsatisfied student-employee who got their parent involved, skipped over their supervisor's director, and went straight to the university president when they had an issue. The parent and student had an objective and goal in mind in terms of resolution. These findings support Daniel et al. (2001) who stated "parents learn quickly to capitalize on institutional chaos and contact a different administrator when they do not achieve their desired outcome" (p. 4). Housing shared that the president gave the student what they

wanted, and an educational opportunity with their supervisor was missed. The customer was right. Most participants shared that students and parents will threaten to go to the president when they are unsatisfied. Some participants shared specific stories of these occurrences. Those participants shared they are not made aware of how those situations are resolved, but overall, they do believe the student and/or parent are given what they want. Student entitlement and expectations are not different; they are one and the same. Students believe they are entitled to their expectations even if staff find their expectations to be unrealistic.

All six participants were asked about student changes and five out of six participants mentioned mental health and technology. Two conclusions were made: (1) students are reliant on technology and feel a sense of uneasiness or anxiety when they must communicate face-to-face, and (2) technology has created a microwave society where there is an expectation for problems to be addressed and resolved almost instantly. Staff are expected to respond to phone calls and emails immediately. Thus, technology has generated a belief that boundaries do not exist in relation to staff and communication. There is an unspoken expectation that staff respond quickly and without parameters.

RQ 3: What coping strategies do student affairs professionals bring to balance this new phenomenon of a student-consumer attitude and sense of entitlement?

Balancing the student-consumer attitude and expectations of others can create added stress for student affairs professionals. They abide by university policy and procedure even though they may not be supported. Students and parents want staff to understand the importance of their situation and to know staff understands where they are coming from. To cope, participants emphasize the importance of letting students and parents feel heard. Health and

Counseling Services said “sometimes what they want is far less than what I believe they want, and the resolutions can happen much easier and much quicker”.

Staff believe there is a correlation between listening and de-escalation. Participants suggested that staff should listen and de-escalate first and talk second. This allows staff to explain their rationale, university policy, and highlight the educational opportunity that exists within the issue. This supported Price (2008) who stated “when parents understand that the primary objective is not just eliminating mistakes but providing multiple opportunities for student learning, then they see these efforts differently (Price, 2008, p. 32).

Staff believe possessing certain characteristics can help during these conversations. These characteristics include being real, calm, genuine, down to earth, and relatable. Additional training is needed to cope with today’s needier students and their complex challenges, student expectations and sense of entitlement, and the consumer attitude. University-provided training focused on customer service, crisis management, conflict resolution, and mental health could benefit not only student affairs professionals but all higher education staff.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study was an attempt to add to the limited body of research surrounding student entitlement, the student-consumer dynamic, and how student affairs professionals can holistically satisfy students in the short and long-term. There are several additional studies that could expand our understanding. First, three participants expressed specific effects of the budget crisis and how the impact is still felt in higher education. This study could be replicated at a private institution to determine if funding and resources are impacting the role and expectations of student affairs professionals. A future study could also examine if a correlation exists between available resources and student entitlement.

Secondly, two participants specifically mentioned student athletes in relation to student entitlement. Two other participants specifically mentioned first generation students, and one participant mentioned students involved with Greek Life. The body of research could be positively impacted by looking at specific student populations and student entitlement. These populations could include first generation students, freshmen, student athletes, students from different socio-economic backgrounds, and students involved with Greek Life. The results may be different, but commonalities may exist with this study that could further support ways student affairs professionals can motivate and serve students.

Third, all six participants emphasized the challenges that arise from dissatisfied students. Satisfaction is important to all university stakeholders and is especially important to student affairs professionals who may be on the receiving end of attitudes associated with dissatisfaction. A replicated study focusing on students' methods of conflict resolution related to the dissatisfaction of resources and services provided by student affairs professionals could provide additional ways to cope with the changing dynamic of the student. Lastly, most participants expressed that technology has impacted students' expectations of others and played a large part in the decline of student mental health. Further exploration into the impact of technology on college students' mental health and their expectations of others could benefit the existing body of research.

Implications

Extensive research analyzing the cause and effect of helicopter parenting and student entitlement exists, yet there is a lack of research analyzing how student affairs professionals can manage this dynamic with a lack of funding for additional resources. In this study, the participants have great recommendations as to how they can assist students; however, these

cannot come to fruition without additional state and federal financial support. Following the budget crisis in 2015 noted in this study, there is a focus on student enrollment, but more needs to be done to retain students.

More needs to be done to prepare high school students for college life and all that comes along with it. Although K-12 teachers and parents may have students' best interest, doing things for them is hindering their development as a person, adult, and student. Students are walking onto college campuses lacking motivation, autonomy, and confidence in themselves. These characteristics can have negative effects for the student far past their college experience and into their professional careers if they are not challenged to develop self-authorship and self-determination. While student affairs professionals cannot be responsible for changes made before the student enters college, they can help advocate for the student once they arrive.

Recall Housing shared that a colleague of his told him that future students may need a hands-on program like Freshman Connection (mentoring program) beyond freshman year. Housing said "they're going to need more hands-on assistance in order to be successful". Implementing more intense supportive measures like intrusive advising, a longer connection program, and classes that teach independence, critical thinking, and communication skills could help student development, success, and retention. The participants shared a desire for additional training and specifically mentioned customer service, mental health, and crisis management training. These training opportunities could provide professionals with a sense of understanding and confidence when encountering stressful, emotional, and challenging situations. This type of training could also benefit the students they serve and support and the parents they interact with.

Student affairs professionals could benefit from additional professional development opportunities. These opportunities could include attending professional conferences regarding

mental health, resiliency, diversity, and the profession itself. Professional development could also include taking a student development course. A student development course could help re-center professionals and provide the proper education to reintroduce and incorporate the language of our theory base. The participants' dialogue regarding student changes supports the idea that students are not the same as they were 50 years ago. Recall Housing said "some of these institutional policies that were created 50 years ago exist for a reason". Perhaps it is time to revisit the long-standing institutional policies and consider making changes that operate with today's student in mind.

Summary

This study explored how student affairs professionals are balancing the expectation that the "customer is always right" while upholding the student and university's expectations to gain perspective of how student affairs professionals are managing the changing dynamic of the consumer. This study sought to create more thorough and specific suggestions for student affairs professionals to holistically satisfy the student in the short-term and long-term. The participants in this study shared a common goal to assist and serve students, but they understand there are expectations from administration, parents, and students as to how they do so. Student affairs professionals are expected to give students what they want, respond to communication instantly and without parameters, complete tasks, and remove barriers to students' success.

This study determined that the customer service mantra "the customer is always right" does exist on a college campus, but it comes with a cost. Giving the student what they want may improve enrollment and retention numbers, but the student's development is stunted as a result. This study determined that today's college student is embarking on their college career with more complex needs and challenges than any generation before. Furthermore, students are ill-

prepared for college, reliant on technology, socially anxious, and seek the fastest, easiest options. Students are no longer seeking the holistically developmental college experience. These students want to get in, get their degree, and get out. Participants discussed how tackling barriers and resolving conflict can be time consuming for students, parents, and student affairs professionals. It is easier and faster for all if a student gets what they want, but the educational opportunities fall to the wayside.

Encouraging students to problem solve, critical think, and resolve their own conflict is important to further their personal development. College students need to be challenged and motivated to find and use their own voice. This process should begin in K-12 and carried out throughout the college experience. Additional resources to support and assist students is needed. Without these resources, student success and retention are difficult to attain. Student affairs professionals find that listening first and talking second help students and parents feel heard. Being real, genuine, and relatable are coping strategies student affairs professionals find helpful to cope and de-escalate entitled and/or emotional parents and students, however, additional training is needed. This study determined that training focused on customer service, crisis management, conflict resolution, and mental health could benefit all higher education professionals and provide additional, beneficial tools and coping skills.

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Appendix A
Candidate Email

Hello,

My name is Brittany Floyd, and I am a graduate student in the College Student Affairs program at EIU. You are invited to participate in a research study for my Master's Thesis, which will be conducted by myself and under the advisement of Dr. Richard Roberts. You have been asked to participate, because you work directly with students and may have contact with parents.

I would like to explore how student affairs professionals are balancing the expectation that the "customer is always right" while upholding the university's policies and procedures during the delivery of resources and services. Assessing these topics may lead to increased student satisfaction, enhanced student development and better prepared student affairs professionals to support, assist, and retain students.

Participation in this study would include a private, confidential interview via Zoom. The interview would last approximately 30 to 60 minutes. Any information obtained for this study will be kept confidential, as all identifying information will be stored separately from interview data and the data will only be used for the purposes of my research.

If you would like to participate in this study, please contact me directly at bfloyd2@eiu.edu. Rest assured that your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you will have the ability to withdrawal at any time without penalty. I look forward to hearing from you! Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Brittany Floyd
M.S. Candidate, College Student Affairs
Department of Counseling and Higher Education
Phone: (217) 581-3827

Appendix B
Interview Questions

Background and role on campus:

- Tell me a little bit about your professional career in student affairs/higher education.
- Tell me about your role on campus.
- Do you provide support or deliver resources to students (including resource referral), and if you do, how so?

Student Affairs/ Expectations

- How do *you* define student affairs?
- What professional expectations do you have of yourself?
- What professional expectations do you have of your staff or colleagues?
- In your experience, has the expectations of student affairs professionals changed over time?

Students

- Do you have direct interaction with students?
- Tell me about your objectives and priorities when providing resources or support to students? What are your expectations?
- Does student development theory play a role in the conversations you have with students and if it does, how so?
- In your experience, what do you observe to be the student's objective or priorities when seeking resources or support?
- Have you experienced a sense of entitlement or consumer attitude during your interaction with a student? If so, please provide an example.
- What is your method for coping with a student who may not particularly agree what you provide?

- Tell me about a time you have interacted with an upset student and how you navigated that conversation and resolution.

Parents

- Do you or your staff have direct interaction with parents?
- In your experience, would you say the dynamic between students and parents have changed? If so, please explain the changes.
- Does student development theory play a role in the conversation you have with parents, and if it does, how so?
- Have you experienced a sense of entitlement or consumer attitude during your interaction with a parent? If so, please provide an example.
- What is your method for coping with a parent who may not particularly agree with what you are saying?
- Tell me about a time you have interacted with an upset parent and how you navigated the conversation and resolution?

Wrap up

- What advice or recommendations would you give to student affairs professionals who may interact with students? Parents?
- If a student affairs professional were to interact with a student who is exhibiting a sense of entitlement or consumer attitude, how would you suggest the student affairs professional balance this dynamic with student development?
- Do you see the role of student affairs professionals changing in the future? Please elaborate.

- Do you see the expectations of student affairs professionals changing in the future?

Please elaborate.