



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

OFFICE OF STUDENT LIFE

“It was more about the functional area”

**Student Affairs Professionals in
Community Engagement
Positions**



Career Choice & Student Affairs

Self-efficacy and career choice

Hackett & Betz, 1981

Social Cognitive Career Theory

Lent, Brown, Hackett, 1994

Motivations to enter Student Affairs

Taub & McEwen, 2006



Student Affairs & Community Engagement

Through my involvement with [service], I found opportunities to **harness my anger and confusion** by learning about and engaging in social justice and community activism. I came to realize that I had learned about myself, others, and the world through service-learning experiences and felt that **they had shaped who I was and what I wanted to do with my life**. I became passionate about **working in service-learning to process difficult questions with students** so that they might have similar transformative learning experiences.

(Hui, 2009)



Research Questions

1. What are the prior life experiences of new student affairs professionals that have influenced their decision to hold a position focused on engaging students with the local community through co-curricular volunteerism, community service, or service-learning?
2. What factors influence individuals' desire to leave or persist in these positions?



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Study Overview

Qualitative Study

Three, one-hour long interviews with each participant

Four participants

Recruited from national list-servs



Sampling

Participants

New Student Affairs professionals focused on community engagement; concerned with general social issues

Sampling Frame

- Three years or less experience in the field
- Earned Master's in Higher Education, Student Affairs, or College Student Personnel
- Institutionalized position; 100% FTE on local community service
- Four year, Urban, Research University



Introduction to Participants

Bethany

White, Middle class, “all gender loving,” worked full-time before pursuing a Master’s

Nora

White, Upper-Middle class, Straight, worked full-time before pursuing a Master’s

Rochelle

Half-Chinese, White, Straight, first-generation college student

Ryan

Half-Latino, White Gay, first-generation college student



Methods, Methodology & Analysis

Constructivist Narrative Methodology

Knowledge and truth are determined through individual interpretation of experience

(Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006)

Semi-structured interviews

Content-Categorical method of analysis

Leiblich, Tuval-Machiach, & Zilber, 1998



Themes Underlying the Narratives

1. Background & Identity
2. Undergraduate Involvement
3. Goal Orientation: Seeking Additional Experiences
4. The Job Search: Focused Concentration, Diverse Positions, Specific Geography



1. Background & Identity



First Generation College Student

[I'm a] first generation college student...I know well what education does for someone. You know, I'm the only person in my family who is still really educated, and so I look at my life and theirs and I can see the power of education...and so that really helped me to see the power of service...seeing the needs of others.

Ryan

I think as a first generation college student... student affairs uhm, was the most appealing to me...I've had an amazing experience and I can provide that... for other people who otherwise... wouldn't have that fulfillment.

Rochelle



Financial Security

I did uhm, two summer AmeriCorps terms. Uhm, I was really lucky that I didn't have to work... while I was taking classes.

Bethany

My parents, uhh supported me through paying tuition, which was a great benefit – I didn't have to worry about that.

Nora



2. Undergraduate Engagement



Undergraduate Engagement

- a. Co-curricular involvement
- b. Service-based leadership roles
- c. Transition from external to internal motivations
- d. Student affairs student employment
- e. Learning about Student Affairs



a. Co-Curricular Involvement

Campus-wide community service events

Residential Service Communities

Alternative Breaks

Leadership student groups



a. Co-Curricular Involvement

For me it was very powerful...I'll never forget... the look on her face when I handed her this food... it was just very powerful because... here's a person who's not only living with HIV, but is also living in a very economically depressed situation where she's stuck in her apartment [because] the elevator doesn't work.

Ryan

[We] would go into [the city] ...once a semester and they would like, bus, hundreds of kids in and we would pick up trash. ...it was very much... the very privileged, educated, well-off kids going in to [the city] for the day and look what good work we are doing.

Bethany



b. Service based leadership roles

It was for sure the first time that I really got to experience helping other people do service and being that facilitator. Uhm, and that's, to me, was a really powerful experience.

Bethany

I was responsible in many ways for facilitating a learning experience for a group of students. ... And it was just really powerful because we thought like, it was the first time I had really thought like a student affairs practitioner...

Ryan



c. Transition from External to Internal Motivations

[The Residential Program] made a huge difference in continuing my community service...I think if I would have ended up in ...a residence hall...I probably wouldn't have taken the initiative to get involved myself.

My sorority was extremely supportive in my interest in doing community service, especially as a chapter because it's not required... but I was like, well, that's lovely but I think it should be required.

Rochelle



d. Student Affairs student employment

[The phone call] really was a sort of A or B moment, you know. I was either going to go abroad or I was going to take this job. And I took the job... And that really is a moment, an actual moment that I've always looked to as really putting me on the path I am now.

Nora

I worked at the [student union] as their first Leadership and Service student intern, and so I was able to sit on the planning committee for the current [leadership and service center], and so it was very cool to work with student affairs staff there and develop these initiatives.

Ryan



e. Learning about Student Affairs

Like many people, it was an assistant director of student activities that told me that this could be a real job.

Nora

I think that when I was younger I realized I wanted to do what [my advisors] did. And I think it was sort of like...very organic. It was never... FYI there's this new field here. It was not like that.

Ryan



3. Goal Orientation



Goal Orientation: Seeking Additional Experiences

I went there with a purpose to do service-learning and... social justice work, and I was going to take those classes... I was able to take...specifics but...that's where I wanted to go with my career. I didn't want to do student affairs to be... the Res Life person.

Bethany

[My program] didn't teach theory related to leadership... So I knew that the place where I could go... because that was where it was centered... they were like, if you want to come here that's fine... it's unpaid, but... you can learn as much as you want.

Ryan



Goal Orientation: Seeking Additional Experiences

I wanted to learn more about Greek life, [my supervisor] really allowed me to embrace that... And what ended up being really great is that...they hired me on as a full time [graduate] assistant working both volunteer programs and Greek life. So I was able to kind of take that and move it in to a full time assistantship.

Nora



4. Job Search



The Job Search: Focused Functional Area, Diverse Positions, Specific Geography

I don't care where you send me as long as it's a metropolitan area, like, I'm not goin' to the middle of Iowa...I want to do to work that brings me in fulfillment and that's leadership and service and social justice work.

Ryan

I was looking for all service-learning jobs... I applied to a job that was working with faculty. Clearly jobs that were working with students. Uhm, and at a range of institutions on you know, their understanding or not understanding of service-learning.

Bethany



Summary

1. Background & Identity
2. Undergraduate Involvement
3. Goal Orientation: Seeking Additional Experiences
4. The Job Search: Focused Concentration, Diverse Positions, Specific Geography



I think it's that capacity building that's...important in what I do...whether it's building capacity and getting students to volunteer or ...building student leaders who can have these conversations around power and privilege and oppression with others.

Bethany



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