STUDENT CONDUCT ADMINISTRATORS' PERCEPTIONS OF SUPPORT

by

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ABSTRACT

ANTHONY K. DAVIS. Student Conduct Administrators' Perceptions of Support. (Under the direction of DR. RYAN A. MILLER)

Within the context of higher education, student conduct administration is drenched in risk, compliance with local and federal laws, and managing the evolving needs and demographics of students (Glick & Haug, 2020). In short, student conduct is a complex, and challenging functional area to work in, as administrators to balance educating students, protecting the campus community, and mitigating institutional risk (Miller & Sorochty, 2015; Lancaster & Waryold, 2008). As higher education continues to evolve, such does the field of student conduct and subsequently the responsibilities and needs of the practitioner.

This qualitative, phenomenological study aimed to explore the lived professional experiences of student conduct administrators; to better understand their struggles and needs, as they would describe. This study also explored support structures for SCAs, specifically looking at their supervisor's role in crafting support. Semi-structured interviews were used to capture depth in the shared experiences of ten participants and describe the meaning assigned to the phenomenon being explored (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Creswell, 1998; Mertens, 2015). The goal of this study was to elevate the voice of SCAs in informing support mechanisms for practitioners that work in this tough field.

The findings of this study were captured in four main themes: (1) Clashing with the Regime, which looks at SCAs challenges navigating political ecosystems within their respective institutions and states, (2) Encountering Turbulence, which captures common challenges SCAs experience while resolving cases (3) Nurtured by Leadership, which looks at the role of SCAs direct supervisor in fostering support and (4) Leaning on the

Village, which captures the network of support SCAs receive outside of their direct supervisor.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Renne Cooper, Uncle June, Aunt Marge, Renee, Pop, Aaisha, AJ, Averi, and Cecil. Their love, support, and encouragement made this possible. I am blessed to have them in my village.

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SCA	Student Conduct Administrator
ASCA	Association of Student Conduct Administrators
SSM	Synergistic Supervision Model
FERPA	Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act
NASPA	National Association of Student Personnel Administrators

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

"Institutions of higher education exist for the betterment of society" (Lancaster & Waryold, 2020, p. 14). Further, these institutions develop policies and guidelines to ensure the sustenance of a campus environment that is not only safe, but one that fosters learning, growth, development, and the pursuit of their respective educational missions. Collectively, these policies and procedures are often found in an institution's student conduct code (code). According to Bach (2003), codes exist to guide the behavior of students and establish procedures to protect the rights of students accused of violating policy during the resolution process. While there are universal elements to student conduct procedures across higher education, state laws, campus culture, and institutional missions all contribute to the development of codes form-fitted to their respective institutions (Hudson, et al., 2018). Consistent at each institution, is the presence of administrators responsible for developing and updating codes and administering the procedures found within them.

In developing policies and procedures to uphold students to community expectations for good behavior, student conduct administrators (SCA) play a critical role in supporting an institution's mission (King, 2012). SCAs aim to support the moral and ethical development of college students while fostering a safe campus environment (Lancaster & Waryold, 2008). According to Hudson et al. (2018), SCAs are uniquely positioned to meet with students at potentially life-altering moments and employ interventions that help them remain in school and develop personal and leadership skills. However, student conduct practice requires balance, as administrators must juggle educating students, honoring the rights of accused students, managing risk, restoring their respective campus communities after harmful events, and responding to

campus threats and safety concerns (Lancaster & Waryold, 2020). Further, SCA must do all the above-mentioned while navigating shifting legal landscapes and rapidly changing student demographics (Neumeister, 2017). Last, SCAs must also be nimble and ready to respond to societal events that spillover onto campuses, such as civil unrest after a racially charged incident or, most recently, the COVID-19 health pandemic.

Statement of the Problem

The work of SCAs is complex and multi-faceted (Waryold & Lancaster, 2020). SCAs are educators, first and foremost, but unlike a faculty member, their responsibility to educate spans the student body, rather than those enrolled in a specific course or degree program (Brown-McClure & Cocks, 2020). Initially, SCAs responded to a limited range of violations, such as curfew violations and gambling (Glick & Degges-White, 2019). However, over time, student misconduct has evolved, becoming more complicated and hazardous. SCAs must respond to different types of incidents, each of which may require specific content area knowledge (e.g., institutional policies, current trends), legal considerations, understanding of a student's developmental level, and engagement of different stakeholders (Glick & Degges-White, 2019). For example, at many institutions, through the student conduct process, SCAs play a key role in maintaining the academic integrity of their respective institutions (Latopolski & Gallant, 2020). When such is the case, SCAs must understand their respective institutions grading and academic dismissal policies and be familiar with technology that is commonly used in academic misconduct, such as "study helper websites" (Harrison et al., 2020, p. 7).

Another example illustrating the complexity of student conduct practice is SCAs' responsibility to resolve hazing cases, which requires a thorough knowledge of how student organizations function and communicate as well as familiarity with institutional and

organizational membership policies and requirements (Shupenko & Tuttle, 2020). Studies (Allan et al., 2019; Cimino, 2018) have shown that it is not only uncommon for students to experience behaviors that would constitute hazing when joining their respective organizations, but to also accept those behaviors because of a strong desire for membership (Cimino, 2011). As a result, when investigating hazing cases, SCAs must often navigate competing interests, whereas the victims and primary witnesses of the behavior may not be forthcoming with information. Last, SCAs must understand how technology may enable organizations to quickly create a uniform, false narrative. For example, mobile messaging apps such as GroupMe allow individuals to share information with large groups within a matter of seconds. While the above-provided examples illustrate the complexity of student conduct practice for two common types of incidents, SCAs must also resolve allegations of sexual misconduct, respond to incidents involving alcohol and drugs, as well as those involving violence or the threat of violence, each of which requires a different approach, basic knowledge, and skill set (Lancaster & Waryold, 2020). Given the complex, layered work of a SCA, institutions should understand how to support professionals who serve in this capacity.

SCAs play an active role in managing risk for their respective institutions (Miller & Sorochty, 2015). Throughout the student conduct process, institutions of higher education rely on SCA to make assessments and decisions that consider risk and reduce institutional liability (Lancaster & Waryold, 2020). These decisions must honor students' constitutional rights by affording students adequate notice of potential violations and an opportunity to be heard, and not infringe on their rights to free expression, while at the same time assessing whether speech is threatening. Further, SCAs must operate within the boundaries of regulatory guidance, such as the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), Violence Against Women Act

(VAWA), Americans with Disabilities Act, and Title IX of the Educational Amendments Act of 1972 (Federal Register, 2020). Within each conduct case, SCAs must consider regulatory guidance and often make decisions that could cost their institutions thousands of dollars in civil lawsuits, result in bad publicity for the university, and have major safety implications (Lake, 2011; Miller & Sorochty, 2015). Due to the amount of risk that accompanies student conduct practice, it is again imperative that institutions understand what is needed to support this functional area.

In attempting to understand how to best support SCAs, attention must be directed to the current body of literature regarding support within a student affairs context. Studies (Boehman, 2007; Guthrie et al., 2005; Saunders et al., 2000) have found that supervisory relationships can influence student affairs professionals' perception of their work environment, in a multitude of ways. Hornak et al. (2016) found that through role modeling, mentoring, and communication of individual, departmental or divisional goals, the supervisory relationship can impact the socialization and on-boarding of new of student affairs professionals. Barham and Winston (2006) noted that quality supervision was one of the most effective tools in retaining student affairs professionals, while Donohue-Mendoza (2012) found supervision to positively influence career advancement. Prevalent in the body of research are studies (Berg & Brown, 2019; Shupp et al., 2018; Shupp & Arminio, 2012; Saunders et al., 2000; Tull, 2006) that highlight the benefits of supervisory relationships. Further, according to Rosser and Javinar (2003), student affairs professionals' perceptions of their "professional and institutional work life have a direct and significant impact on both their satisfaction and morale" (p. 822). While the above-mentioned studies have examined the role of supervision within a general student affairs context, missing from the literature are studies that specifically look at the role of supervision within the

student conduct functional area. Considering the complexity of, and again, the risk associated with, student conduct practice, developing an understanding of how to support these professionals may inform practice that increases retention and job satisfaction, as well as aid in recruiting new professionals within the field. Collectively, studies have shown that supervision can positively impact employees. Therefore, developing an understanding of SCAs experience within the context of their supervisory relationship can serve as a focal point in exploring their experiences related to overall support within the workplace.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to gain depth into the lived professional experiences of SCAs, to better understand how to support administrators within this functional area. This study will explore aspects of student conduct practice that SCAs perceive to be challenging and capture their descriptions of contributors to workplace support.

Research Questions

There are three research questions that will guide this study:

1. What do student conduct administrators perceive to be the most challenging aspects of their job?
2. How do student conduct administrators describe a supportive work environment?
3. How do student conduct administrators describe their supervisory experience?

Overview of Research Methodology

The methodology and design of this study were informed by the research questions. As this study seeks to delve into the lived professional experience of SCAs, a qualitative, phenomenological research design was utilized. Phenomenology seeks to better understand and describe an experience from the perspective of the participants (Creswell, 1998; Mertens, 2015;

Smith et al., 2009). As this study intends to better understand the professional experiences of SCAs and capture their description of contributors to support, phenomenology was a natural alignment.

Utilizing a constructivist paradigm, this study will use a purposeful sampling strategy to identify 8-12 participants that currently work in the student conduct functional area with student conduct practice being their primary job responsibility (Mertens, 2015). Purposeful sampling was used because of its ability to provide "context-rich and detailed accounts of specific populations" (Ravitch & Carl, 2021, p. 83). The Association for Student Conduct Administration (ASCA) list serv will be utilized to identify potential participants for the study.

As phenomenology is grounded in hermeneutics, or "the study of interpretive understanding or meaning" (Mertens, 2015, p.16), data will be collected using in-depth, semi-structured interviews to capture participants understanding of their lived experiences. Semi-structured interviews are used for guided, purposeful data collection but also leave room for probing and follow-up questions to be used as needed per participant (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Each interview will last 60-90 minutes and will be conducted virtually to ensure the safety of participants during the Covid-19 global health pandemic. Prior to interviewing, each participant will complete a demographic form to ensure they meet the criteria needed to allow for in-depth exploration of the phenomena. All interviews will be transcribed, and data will be analyzed using thematic analysis, to identify common themes amongst participants (Ravitch and Carl, 2021).

As this study aims to capture the lived professional experiences of SCAs, it will draw upon concepts from the literature, but heavily focus on experiences of the participants. Staple literature on student conduct practice (Hudson et al., 2018; Lancaster & Waryold, 2008, 2020;

Miller & Sorochty, 2015; Schrage et al., 2009) will be used to illustrate common challenges, such as risk, legality, and the variety of issues to which SCAs must respond to. By examining the complexity and challenges of student conduct practice from the perspective of SCAs, this study seeks to better understand challenges as well as support mechanisms within the student conduct functional area.

In terms of support, scholars have found that the supervisory relationship plays a key role in making student affairs practitioners feel supported in their professional capacity (Bailey & Hamilton, 2015; Janosik et al., 2003; Saunders et al., 2000, Shupp & Arminio, 2012, Tull, 2006; Tull et al., 2009). Of equal importance are studies (Bender, 2009; Boehman, 2007; Burke, 2016) that have found the supervisory relationship valuable in contributing to overall employee satisfaction, which has also been linked to increased feelings of support. Further, scholars (Marshall et al., 2016; Mullen et al., 2018) identified harmful effects of employee dissatisfaction in the student affairs workplace such as burnout, intent to turnover, and attrition from the field, each of which can harm an organization. Arminio and Creamer (2001) noted that intentional, structured, quality supervision benefits individual staff members as well as the institution. Given such, this study also seeks to explore SCAs experience within their supervisory relationship, as a focal point for exploring contributors to support.

Conceptual Framework

This study was designed using a combination of literature, findings from empirical studies, and theories used to help formulate the research questions and interpret shared experiences. The design for this study is based on concepts from one of the original student development theories, Nevitt Sanford's (1966) theory of challenge and support. While studying college students, Sanford noted that growth and development happens when they are both

challenged and provided support within their environment (Hamrick et al., 2002). While this study will look at full-time professionals rather than college students, several concepts of Sanford's theory will guide the assumptions of this study when it comes to data analysis, including the relationship/balance between challenge and support, how support is defined, and the impact of peer support.

Although the experiences of SCAs will primarily guide this study, staple literature (Lancaster & Waryold, 2008; Lancaster & Waryold, 2020; Hudson et al., 2018; Miller & Sorochty, 2015; Schrage et al., 2009) will be used to illustrate and examine the multifarious nature of student conduct practice, by drawing attention to risk management, legality, and the variety of issues to which SCAs must respond to. By doing such, a framework will be developed to explore the complexity and challenges of student conduct practice from the perspective of the practitioner. As this study seeks to inform ways to support the student conduct functional area, it will closely examine the role of supervision in contributing to support.

Supervision not only plays a key role in ensuring quality services are provided and ensuring an organization's goals are met, but also in supporting developing staff (Stock-Ward & Javorek, 2003). Bolman and Deal (2013) noted that organizations that understand and are responsive to the needs of their employees benefit from having a motivated work force. Applying this concept within the context of student conduct practice in student affairs, for the purpose of conducting this study, directs us to the body of literature on supervision within student affairs.

Winston and Creamer (1997) not only provided a comprehensive guide to staffing practices in student affairs, but they also offered a specific model for supervision that has guided practice and research. As this study seeks to examine the supervisory relationship's role in

hindering or contributing to perceptions of support, Winston, and Creamer's (1997) Synergistic Supervision Model (SSM) seated within the notion of support, will help frame this study. Figure 1 provides an illustration of the concepts used to frame this study.

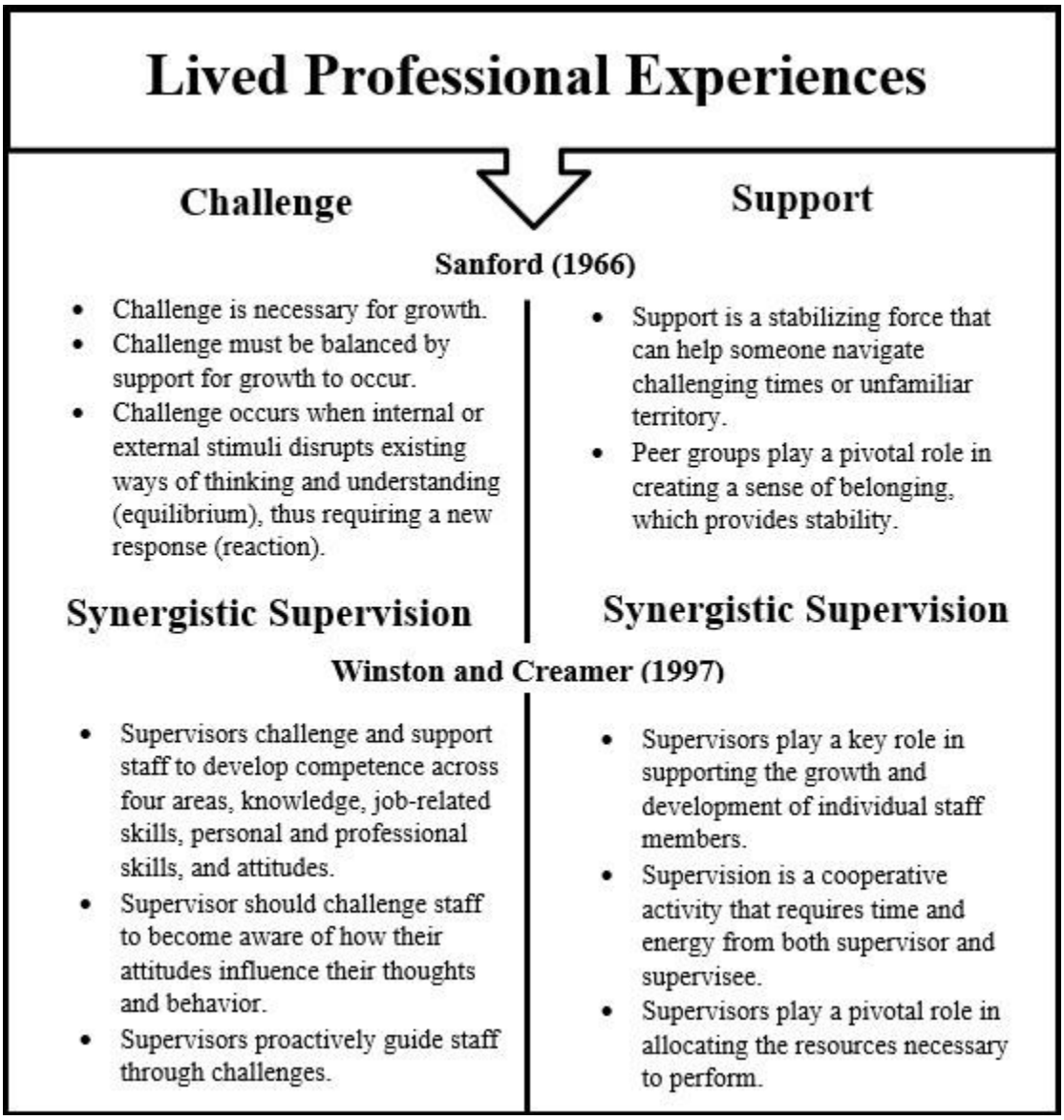

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework

Significance of the Study

Because student conduct practice requires a tremendous amount of skill in responding to a diverse range of campus issues, the literature on student conduct lends itself to areas such as best practice, knowledge of laws, policies and mandates, assessment (Glick & Degges-White, 2019; Hudson et al., 2018; Lancaster & Waryold, 2020) and student learning outcomes (Janosik & Stimpson, 2017; King, 2012; Stimpson & Janosik, 2011; Neumeister, 2017). While it's undeniable that research exists to inform practice, missing in the literature are studies that aim to provide depth in understanding the needs of the practitioner. As Zacker (2020) noted, institutions and their leadership must understand and recognize the important role SCAs play on campus, as these professionals "carry some of the greatest institutional liability" (p. 265). While such is the case, Zacker (2020) found that SCAs are not only often on the low end of compensation when compared to other professionals within divisions of student affairs, but their offices are also under-funded and understaffed. Given the weight of the decisions made by SCA, their voices should be considered in developing an understanding of how to best support this functional area. This study aims to amplify the voice of the practitioner.

Delimitations

Interview participants will be delimited to individuals whose primary professional responsibility is student conduct and those who are currently working in the field. Excluded from participating in this study, are those responsible for administering student conduct practice in a previous role or secondary capacity, such as residence hall directors, faculty, and professionals working in fraternity and sorority affairs. This demographic was purposefully selected due to their first-hand knowledge of and experience with the phenomenon, student conduct practice.

Assumptions

This study operates under a few key assumptions. First, this study assumes that each participant was honest about their current work responsibilities and functional area. Another assumption made is that participants will not only understand and comprehend the interview questions but answer each question honestly. An assumption relevant to the phenomenon being explored, is the participants view that student conduct practice is challenging. Last, this study operates under the assumption that each participant will be able to safely answer each question and that data from each interview will be stored securely.

Definitions

While the terms used to describe student conduct systems vary by institution (Miller & Salinas, 2019), the following terms have been operationalized to provide common language to guide this study. Some definitions are informed by the literature, and some are constructed in my own language.

Title IX. Title IX refers to Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, which specify how recipients of federal financial assistance must respond to allegations of sexual harassment to prohibit sex discrimination (Federal Register, 2020).

FERPA. FERPA refers to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, a federal law that protects the privacy of student education records. The law applies to all schools that receive funds under an applicable program of the U.S. Department of Education (Federalregister.gov, n.d.).

Hazing. Hazing is defined as any activity expected of someone joining or participating in a group that humiliates, degrades, abuses, or endangers them, regardless of a person's willingness to participate. Hazing occurs within a group context, involves humiliating or

degrading behavior, and happens regardless of an individual's willingness to participate (StopHazing.org, n.d.).

Student Conduct Administrator (SCA). Student conduct administrator refers to student affairs professionals whose primary responsibility is the administration of student conduct practice. This does not include those with secondary conduct responsibility, such as faculty, residence life live-in professionals, and Greek life professionals.

Student Conduct Code (Code). A student conduct code is a document that lists all prohibited behaviors/violations and outlines an institution's student conduct process (Miller & Salinas, 2019).

Student Conduct Practice. Student conduct practice refers to the "processes and procedures through which colleges and universities manage student behavior" (Nelson, 2017, p.1274).

Violation. A violation refers to any incident in which a student is believed to have violated the student conduct code or been involved in prohibited behavior.

Summary

This chapter introduced the problem and provided a high-level overview of the research methods used to conduct this study focused on the lived professional experiences of student conduct administrators (SCAs). Student conduct practice is complex and challenging, and SCAs play a key role in responding to conduct issues and helping to ensure an institution achieves its mission. Mishandled conduct issues could undermine an institution's educational mission, result in the loss of life, legal and financial penalties, and bad publicity for an institution. Therefore, it is imperative that institutions provide adequate support to SCAs as well as the functional area. This study explored SCAs' perceptions of challenge and support to better understand and inform

support mechanisms. Next, chapter two will present a review of the literature that supports this study, highlighting the intricate components of student conduct practice as well as the concepts from the literature on supervision within a student affairs context.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

As the implementation of a student conduct system is often tied to an institution's mission, the philosophy and approach to student conduct practice varies from campus to campus (Miller & Salinas, 2019). However, on most college campuses, student conduct administration consists of the policies, processes, and procedures used to address student behavioral concerns (Nelson, 2017). These concerns vary in nature and severity, ranging from lower-level violations, such as possession of illegal drugs and alcohol while under the age of 21 to serious behavioral concerns such as hazing, sexual assault, illegal drug distribution, and targeted violence. Each type of violation presents dynamics which can undermine an institution's educational mission, compromise campus safety, increase legal liability, and result in negative publicity (Lake, 2011; Lancaster &Waryold, 2008,2020; Miller & Sorochty, 2015). Therefore, institutions of higher education must prioritize supporting this area within student affairs. To provide adequate support to the student conduct functional area, colleges and universities must not only understand the complexity of student conduct practice, but also the needs of the practitioner. As studies have shown that quality supervision leads to increased feelings of job satisfaction and support (Barham & Winston, 2006; Bender, 2009; Boehman, 2007; Sermersheim & Keim, 2005; Saunders et al., 2000; Tull, 2006; Winston & Creamer, 1997), the supervisor relationship serves as a practical starting point in understanding the experiences of SCAs and what is needed to support this functional area. Further, the current body of literature lacks density in terms of exploring the specific supervisory needs of student conduct administrators. This study aims to address this gap in scholarly research by capturing the experiences of the SCA, while informing supervision practice and support mechanisms within a mission-critical area of student affairs.

This chapter presents a review of literature on student conduct administration and supervisory practices.

Student Conduct Administration

Student conduct administration is one of many areas within the field of student affairs that requires skill and competence (Brown-McClure & Cocks, 2020; Neumeister, 2017). Colleges and universities task student conduct administrators (SCAs)with upholding values and standards that align with their institutional mission and support their healthy function (Acosta et al., 2018). Subsequently, the work of a student conduct administrator (SCA) is complex (Brown-McClure & Cocks, 2020), and often requires balancing competing objectives (Neumeister, 2017). Institutions of higher education rely on SCAs to balance implementing fair procedures that uphold student rights, manage risk by responding to campus threats and safety concerns, and restore their respective campus communities, all while prioritizing holistic development of individual students involved in the conduct process (Brown-McClure & Cocks, 2020). According to Acosta et al. (2018), SCAs make objective assessments and decisions that weigh the needs of individual students as well as the campus community. While institutional size and type may influence the responsibilities of a SCA, there are fundamental tenets of the work that remain consistent (Lancaster & Waryold, 2020).

Managing the Student Conduct System

Central to the responsibilities of a SCA is oversight of the student conduct system, which often includes an incident reporting structure, hearing/resolution procedures, alternate resolution procedures, appeals, and management of student records (Brown-McClure & Cocks, 2020). At most institutions, the policies and procedures that make up the student conduct system can be found in writing within its student code of conduct or “code”, a comprehensive document which

outlines the institutions expectations for behavior, the rights afforded to students within the system and the process for resolving allegations of misconduct (King, 2012). According to Miller and Sorochty (2015), most codes consist of four elements: community standards that students are expected to uphold, the procedures for resolving alleged violations of those standards, the rights afforded to students accused of violating those standards, and the possible sanctions/outcomes the institution could assign. While codes vary by institutional type and size (Acosta et al., 2018), many codes resemble each other, as scholars (Stoner & Lowery, 2004). have developed model codes to serve as standard templates for institutions to use. These model codes provide a consistent shell or structure for institutions to use. At many institutions, SCAs play an integral role in writing and/or revising their respective codes.

Administration of the student conduct process is a common responsibility of the SCA, which includes responding to incident reports, investigating, and resolving complaints by conducting hearings and/or issuing sanctions (Brown--McClure & Cocks, 2020, Stimpson & Janosik, 2015). Federal court rulings have established benchmarks for procedural due process standards within student conduct systems at public institutions, which include providing adequate notice of violations, a summary of the evidence, and opportunity to respond (Stimpson & Janosik, 2015). SCA are tasked with conducting an ethical and equitable process (Acosta et.al, 2018). Equally important, is a SCAs ability to administer a process that is perceived to be fair. Janosik and Stimpson (2017) found that students going through the conduct process reported higher levels of student learning when they perceived the conduct process to be fair and felt they were treated with respect. Brown--McClure and Cocks, (2020) also highlighted the benefits of an effective conduct process in promoting individual student learning and growth through ethical and moral development, while promoting a safe campus community.

While the student conduct process is accessed after a policy violation is believed to have occurred, SCAs utilize a variety of alternative forms of resolution to address harmful behavior and restore their communities. that may not rise to the level of violation or that is protected by law (Brown-Mclure & Cocks, 2020; Schrage & Giacomini, 2009). Alternative resolution forms include mediation, facilitated dialogue, restorative justice circles, and educational conversations (Schrage & Giacomini, 2009), and provide SCAs with options to address a range of student behavioral concerns (Glick & Degges-White, 2019).

Addressing Student Behavioral Concerns

Student behavioral concerns have become increasingly complex and often involve layers of risk and hazard (Glick & Degges-White, 2019; Lowery, 2020). Due to their expertise in addressing student misconduct, navigating legal landscapes, and applying objective standards, SCAs often serve as subject matter experts on their respective campuses, when it comes to responding to student behavioral concerns, which can present in many ways (Lowery, 2020).

Organizational Misconduct

Organizations recognized by the institution are granted special privileges, such as the ability to reserve and use spaces on campus, and access to funds for programming and travel (Miller & Sorochty, 2015). However, student organizations are only recognized by the institution, after agreeing to abide by laws and campus policies (Shupenko & Tuttle, 2020). Therefore, student organizations can be held accountable within student conduct systems just as individual students are (Shupenko & Tuttle, 2020). Because SCAs know their institutions polices and have experience enforcing them, they are almost always involved in organizational misconduct procedures (Miller & Sorochty, 2015; Shupenko & Tuttle, 2020).

When it comes to misconduct, the dynamics of student organizations and the nature of their misconduct present multi-faceted issues for SCAs (Cimino, 2018; Miller & Sorochty, 2015). Allegations of organizational misconduct often require SCAs to sift through a series of individual behaviors that could be violations to determine whether the organization is culpable (Shupenko & Tuttle, 2020). Student conduct administrators must also overcome the use of group communication technology, which may allow large amounts of students to quickly communicate with one another and craft the perfect story. Allegations of organizational misconduct may involve non-students such as alumni members of the group or students from other institutions that are a part of the same organization, thus requiring coordination with external entities such as law enforcement agencies and other institutions. For example, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill removed three fraternities for their involvement in a $1.5 million dollar drug trafficking ring that included students from Duke University and Appalachian State (Peiser, 2020). Each institution also cooperated with local and federal law enforcement agencies, as the investigation took place over 3 years.

Another challenge of investigating organizational misconduct is the large amounts of witnesses to interview, many of whom are members of the organization and therefore have a vested interest in protecting it. For example, a SCA investigating an allegation of hazing may have difficulty getting the facts, when interviewing the victims of hazing, as those victims may be invested in securing membership in the organization or acceptance from senior members of the group. Shupenko and Tuttle (2020) acknowledge that no two investigations are the same and lay out a basic roadmap for investigating a student organization, which includes forming an investigatory team, intense interview preparation, and follow-up discussion with the

investigatory team. However, each institution is staffed and positioned differently, which may make this roadmap difficult to follow for smaller institutions.

While hazing, drugs, and alcohol are common organizational misconduct violations SCAs must resolve, student organizations also present unique challenges related to civility. In 2015, student conduct administrators at the University of Oklahoma (OU), were confronted with resolving the viral post of a racist video made by its chapter of Sigma Alpha Epsilon fraternity (Moyer, 2015). The video used racial slurs and made references to racial violence. While the OU was able to expel the students involved, incidents of this nature are not always actionable for SCAs.

Civility Issues

Student conduct administrators are often the subject matter experts at their respective institutions when it comes to responding to student behavioral issues, some of which may be protected by U.S. Constitution or state laws (Bird et al., 2020). At public institutions, SCAs must respond to protected speech that does not align with institutional values and/or community standards then manage civility issues after an event has transpired (Lancaster & Waryold, 2020). In 2012, Penn State University's chapter of Chi Omega (sorority), made headlines after a photo leaked of their members dressed up in sombreros and wearing mustaches to participate in a Mexican-themed party (Orso, 2015). While the event was protected by the First Amendment thus shielding the sorority from student conduct proceedings, that didn't negate any harm photo may have had on the campus community. Further, a SCA must be able to identify and respond to speech that is not protected, especially as it relates to threats of harm (Bird et al., 2020). SCAs must also be trained and prepared to respond to bias-related incidents which may involve threats, violence, vandalism, or property damage inspired by a bias towards members of a protected class

(Bryant & Dixon, 2020). These incidents often send ripples throughout the community, and in institutions response or lack thereof, can cause further harm or promote restoration and healing (Schrage & Giacomini, 2009). Student conduct administrators often serve on bias response teams and/or respond to incidents of bias in their everyday capacity (Bryant & Dixon, 2020).

Behavior Intervention/Threat Assessment

In response to targeted violence such as the tragic mass shooting that occurred at Virginia Tech in 2007 and Northern Illinois University not even one year later, colleges and universities formed multi-disciplinary teams to identify behaviors that may precede violence for the sake of intervention (Deisinger et al., 2008; Van Brunt, 2012). The teams are commonly referred to as either the behavior intervention team (BIT) or threat assessment team (TAT) or threat assessment and management Team (TAM), and consist of professionals from different areas across campus, that each bring a different expertise to the table. Collectively, the group evaluates student behavior and determines the best response to prevent a situation from escalating to harm to self and others (Deisinger et al.,2008). Because SCA can objectively assess student behavior and then direct that student down the best path to address the issue at hand, they often play a critical role in implementing their respective institutions behavior intervention and threat assessment protocols, and almost always serve on these teams (Lancaster & Waryold, 2020). Also, SCAs can mandate psychological assessments, forensic assessments, and even temporarily remove/suspend a student, if necessary, to prevent targeted violence and mitigate risk (Adams, 2020; Van Brunt, 2012). Last, SCAs have experience navigating legal pitfalls, such as student privacy laws and federal anti-discrimination laws such as the Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Risk Management

Student conduct practice is drenched in risk, and SCAs must balance upholding community standards and expectations for behavior with managing risk and minimizing liability by understanding and honoring rights students are afforded established by laws (Acosta et al., 2018; Brown-McClure & Cocks, 2020). According to Lowery (2020), many of the rights afforded to students within a student conduct process are the results of court decisions, or state and federal laws. For example, in the 1961 landmark case of Dixon v. Alabama State Board of Education, the Supreme Court ruled that public institutions must provide students accused of misconduct adequate notice and an opportunity to be heard (Dixon v. Alabama, 1961; Lee, 2014; Lowery, 2020). In 1975, the Supreme Court ruled that the right to an education was a property right protected by the 14th amendment of the U.S. Constitution in the case of Goss v. Lopez (Ellis, 1976). This ruling further cemented student rights and affirmed that students must be provided with an explanation of the evidence against them and opportunity to present a defense. While each of these rulings catered to the procedural rights public institutions must afford to their students, that does not mean that private institutions are in the clear. Student rights at private institutions are primarily afforded by contractual relationships established by the policies they publish (Lowery, 2020; Miller & Sorochty, 2014). Therefore, SCA must administer procedures in accordance with those listed in their code. Regardless of the type of institution that employs them, SCA must develop policies that comply with laws tied to federal funding such as the Drug Free Schools and Communities Act, the Jeanne Clery Disposure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Crime Statistics Act (Clery Act), and the Americans with Disabilities Act (Miller & Sorochty, 2014).

Student conduct administrators must be confident in their ability to carry out the complex tasks of the work. Glick and Degges-White's (2019) study of student conduct administrators found positive correlations between tenure in the field and perceived competency in several skills, "Investigatory, Conflict Resolution, Legal Knowledge, and Discipline Specific Theory," (p. 177) critical to the functional area. Given the complexity of student conduct practice and the risk involved, SCAs should engage in ongoing professional development and their respective institutions should prioritize supporting these efforts. Aside from allocating fiscal resources to communicate this priority, institutions can potentially utilize supervision to support and retain SCAs, as "supervisory relationships hold great potential to influence self-image, job satisfaction, and professional development" (Tull et al., 2009, p.130). The benefit of leveraging supervision to foster support within SCAs is that supervisory relationships exist at every institution and these professional relationships have the potential to be adjusted or modified to better serve SCAs.

Supervision in Student Affairs

There is no shortage of literature highlighting the importance of people within organizations. Janosik et al (2003) recognized one of an organization's most valuable assets is its workforce, the people within it that help the organization achieve its purposes and goals. Further, talented, committed workers allow an organization to achieve its goals (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Winston &Creamer, 1997). Within the field of higher education, student affairs professionals play an integral role in administration, offering programs, delivering services, and shaping experiences that develop the whole student (Long, 2012). As student affairs is a service-oriented profession, naturally, professionals in the field must be adequately trained and ready to utilize best practices to meet the evolving needs of students as well as the institutions that

employ them (Hirschy et al., 2015). Subsequently, supervisors play a key role in training and development.

There are many reasons supervision has remained a focal point within student affairs research. First, personnel management is either excluded from the curriculum or given very little priority within student affairs graduate programs (Barham & Winston, 2006; Donohue-Mendoza, 2012). Shupp and Arminio (2012) found that even student affairs graduate programs with internship components fall short in providing insight on the supervision. Also, even though managers and supervisors play an important role in the development of staff, many professional associations within student affairs do not emphasize supervision (Barham & Winston, 2006). Donohue-Mendoza (2012) noted that supervision in student affairs often focuses on managing or responding to a crisis rather than enhancing performance and fostering development. Elrod et al (2015) studied student affairs supervision within a community college setting and found that a variety of supervision styles were being utilized by supervisors. A consistent find within the body of research was the need for formal supervision training to create a more uniform experience (Elrod et al., 2015; Shupp & Arminio, 2012; Tull, 2006). Because supervision requires trust, communication, active listening, and honesty, Donohue-Mendoza (2012) noted that supervision should be an institutional priority. Shupp and Arminio (2012) recommended institutions commit to formal supervision and leverage partnerships to supplement supervision efforts through mentoring.

While professional development is important, even more critical are the onboarding and supervision processes, which can influence new professionals career progression as well as their decision to exit the field (Hirschy et al.,2015). By communicating the values of the institution and the profession, supervisors play a key role in the socialization process, which can contribute

to the development of a strong professional identity (Hirschy et al., 2015). Donohue-Mendoza, (2012) noted the importance of establishing relationships in the institutional on-boarding process for new professionals and highlighted the supervisory relationship as being one of the most important. The supervisory relationship, especially for entry-level/new student affairs professionals, can be a factor in their decision to persist or exit the field (Barham & Winston, 2006). Also, according to Shupp and Arminio (2012), the education and development of entry-level staff members in student affairs will play a key role in shaping the profession's future.

The Impacts of Quality Supervision

Saunders et al (2000) noted that supervision is a vital skill for mid-level managers in student affairs, as they are likely to manage entry-level staff and are also often first-time supervisors. Sermersheim and Keim (2005), found that personnel management was a heavily valued and needed skill by mid-level managers in student affairs. However, Barham and Winston (2006) discovered that younger mid-level managers had a difficult time diagnosing the supervisory needs of entry-level staff, but indicated they had some degree of responsibility to create opportunity or serve as a gateway for the supervisee to get beneficial and meaningful professional experiences under their belt. Barham and Winston (2006) also found that supervisors of new professionals perceived their supervisees as needing involvement in their respective professional associations, campus-wide committees and working groups, and networking opportunities outside of the department.

Career Progression

Supervision plays a key role in helping student affairs professionals increase/maximize their performance, which can lead to career advancement (Jenkins, 2015). Through the supervisory relationship, staff members can gain an accurate picture of their skills as well as

areas for improvement (Saunders et al., 2000). In turn, they can address deficiencies in specific areas. Supervisors can also help advance new professionals by engaging them in professional development (Sermersheim & Keim, 2005). According to Barham and Winston (2006) supervisors should not only challenge new professionals to progress their career, but also serve as a catalyst for their advancement within the field. Saunders et al (2000) noted that employees have a right to expect guidance from their supervisors in their pursuit of opportunities to advance. On the other side of the coin, Donohue-Mendoza (2012) found that minimalist supervision has a harmful impact on career progression.

Positive Morale/Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction refers to a positive emotional response an individual has to the work they perform (Mullen et al., 2018). Studies have shown that student affairs professionals' perceptions of their work life can impact their morale, perceived job satisfaction, and intent to remain in the field (Rosser & Javinar, 2003; Tull et al., 2009). Tull (2006) found that positive supervisory relationships correlate to increased supervisee perceptions of opportunities for goal attainment and overall employee satisfaction. Boehman (2007) referred to commitment as an individual's ability to internalize the goals of the organization, devote effort to achieve them, partnered with their desire to remain employed there, and noted that perceptions of job satisfaction and support influence commitment. Bender (2009) found that the perception of the job being performed as important within the context of the institution led to increased commitment. Another factor found to contribute to student affairs professionals' commitment to their respective institution, is the perception of a supportive work environment. Boehman (2007) identified three domains of perception as it relates to work environment, that are critical to fueling perceptions of support:

"perception creates reality," "the reflection of what the individual wants to see," and "the multiple conclusions reached by the change in a single dynamic" (p. 320).

Reduced Stress/Staff Retention

A frustrating work environment is a factor that can cause new professionals to intend to leave their position or leave the field altogether (Winston & Creamer, 1997). Stress occurs when a person's perceptions of work-related demands outweigh their perceived ability to manage those demands (Mullen et al., 2018). Job stress lessens morale and harmfully impacts employee satisfaction in new student affairs professionals (Ward, 1995). Another effect of job stress is burnout, which refers to the emotional exhaustion an individual experiences due to the imbalance of perceived coping skills and demands. Burnout can lead to intent to turnover as well as attrition from the field (Tull, 2006). Attrition can also happen when employees do not feel valued by their respective institutions or perceive their division or unit is not valued by the institution (Boehman, 2007). In addition to costing the institution money, attrition can inhibit an organization or unit's ability to accomplish its goals (Boehman, 2007). This study found a positive association between high levels of job stress/burnout and intention to turnover.

Quality supervision can serve as a means to retain staff within their respective institutions and the field of student affairs as whole (Winston & Creamer, 1997). Supervisors in student affairs can play a pivotal role in mediating job stress and preventing burnout by emphasizing wellness and self-care (Mullen et al., 2018). Tull (2006) also noted the role of effective supervision in increasing job satisfaction, and thus reducing attrition from the field.

Synergistic Model of Supervision

Personnel management and supervision are essential in helping an organization achieve its goals (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Barham and Winston (2006) emphasized the value of

intentional collaboration between supervisors and supervisees in leading to desirable outcomes for the institution. While there are many models of effective supervision across disciplines, the Synergistic Supervision Model (SSM) was constructed with student affairs in mind, and therefore caters to the unique needs of student affairs professionals (Berg & Brown, 2019; Winston & Creamer, 1997). The SSM provides a solid theoretical framework to guide practice within the field and serve as a baseline for empirical research (Berg & Brown, 2019; Shupp & Arminio, 2012; Tull, 2006). The Synergistic model of supervision consists of seven elements: *dual focus, joint effort, two-way communication, focus on competence, goals, systematic ongoing process, and growth orientation* (Winston & Creamer, 1998). The dual-focus component of Synergistic supervision emphasizes that the supervisory relationship carries a dual-focus on accomplishing the institutional goals as well as promoting the personal and professional development of staff members to accomplish personal goals (Winston & Creamer, 1998). As institutions expect their employees to contribute to the advancement of their mission, employees have expectations of their institution, to contribute to the advancement of their career. Winston and Creamer (1997) noted that "fostering the individual development of staff" was a functional component of supervision (p. 42).

Winston and Creamer (1997) proposed that regardless of the power dynamic at play, each party in the supervisory relationship must invest time, energy, and effort into the relationship, while taking a cooperative approach to make the relationship work. Supervisors and supervisees should work to develop teamwork capabilities and improve group dynamics (Winston & Creamer, 1997). The SSM requires collaboration between the supervisor and supervisee to attain the goals of the organization and cultivate the individual professional development goals of the supervisee (Shupp & Arminio, 2012).

According to Winston and Creamer (1998), because of the importance of feedback and criticism, open and honest two-way communication from both parties is also a critical component of the supervisory relationship. Performance appraisals, one of the landmarks of the supervisory relationship, are effective when sensitive and integrated with the supervision process, and when great communication exists between the supervisor and supervisee (Winston & Creamer, 1997). When great communication exists, criticism and feedback can be viewed as developmental and helpful, thus making the performance appraisal a constructive process.

Competence is another key component of synergistic supervision. Winston and Creamer (1998) break competence down into four key areas of emphasis, knowledge, work-related skills, personal and professional skills, and attitudes. Competence begins with possessing the knowledge necessary to perform the job at a high level and requires the development of position-specific, work- related tasks (Winston & Creamer, 1998). In addition to skills essential to performing work related tasks, there are personal and professional skills that are vital to competence, such as time management, public speaking and presenting, and stress management (Winston & Creamer, 1998). Finally, attitude is critical to competence within synergistic supervision because of its effect on work performance.

Synergistic supervision focuses on the personal and professional growth of staff involved (Winston & Creamer, 1998). “Staff development is the principal staffing mechanism for personnel, program, and organization improvement in student affairs” (Winston & Creamer, 1997, p.219). The growth and development of staff is an essential component to synergistic supervision and serves as a catalyst for the dual-focus component of the model. Therefore, synergistic supervisors assist their supervisees in assessing competence and career goals.

In the SSM, goals are important in providing structure for the supervisory relationship and tie directly to performance appraisal (Winston & Creamer, 1997). The systematic review of both short-term and long-term goals can provide a shell for a cooperative supervisory effort (Winston & Creamer,1998). Furthermore, categorizing goals into the concepts of maintenance and innovation for the organization and professional development for the individual, allows for systematic review to occur within the supervisory relationship (Winston & Creamer, 1997).

Synergistic supervision requires a methodical approach to meetings, feedback, and goal setting (Winston & Creamer, 1998). For supervision to be synergistic, supervisees must get regularly scheduled, uninterrupted facetime with their supervisors (Winston & Creamer, 1997). Regular meetings allow both parties to give and receive immediate feedback and discuss progress on tasks, goals, and projects.

The Value of Synergistic Supervision

Scholars have found value in using the SSM as a theoretical framework to guide supervision practice and grow the body of research on personnel management within student affairs. Saunders et al. (2000) saw enough value in the model to develop the Synergistic Supervision Scale (SSS), a 22-item instrument designed to measure the degree to which supervision was perceived to demonstrate behaviors as defined by the SSM. Bailey and Hamilton (2015) noted that supervision conducted within a synergistic framework allows for performance expectations to align the goals of the organization with the professional development goals of the individual supervisee. Shupp et al. (2018) affirmed the value of the SSM in developing their Inclusive Supervision Inventory. After examining the relationships between perceived level of synergistic supervision, job satisfaction, and intention to turn over for entry level student affairs professionals, Tull (2006) found discovered a positive correlation

between job satisfaction and perceived level of synergistic supervision and a negative correlation between intent to turnover and perceived synergistic supervision., as the sample was not fully representative of new student affairs professionals. Using the SSM as a framework, Shupp and Arminio (2012) also found that supervisees desire a more focused approach to supervision with increased guidance from their supervisor, as well as an institutional commitment to staff development, both of which are consistent with elements of the SSM. Barham and Winston (2006) found increased levels of job satisfaction when the supervision preferences of supervisor and supervisee matched. study of supervisor-supervisee relationships, the researchers, again supporting elements of the SSM.

Summary

The first bucket of literature in this chapter illustrates the complexity of student conduct administration, identifying common tasks of a student conduct administrator and how those tasks may compete with one another. The second bucket of literature focuses on the importance of supervision within the field of student affairs, specifically highlighting how supervision has contributed to perceptions of support and job satisfaction within the field. While there is dense literature on student conduct practice, there have been few studies that focus on the practitioner and their professional needs. This study has the potential to provide important context that can guide institutions on how they can support a functional area critical to helping them carry out their mission.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived professional experiences of student conduct administrators. Intending to better understand how to support this functional area, the study seeks to provide rich descriptions of the aspects of the job that SCAs perceive to be challenging as well as their perceptions of supportive work environment. The sections included in this chapter provide descriptions of the research methodology used to conduct this study and provide information on procedures for recruitment and sampling, data collection, and data analysis. Also included in this chapter are my reflexivity statement, and the ethical considerations for this study. The research questions that will guide this study are as follows:

1. What do student conduct administrators perceive to be the most challenging aspects of their job?
2. How do student conduct administrators describe a supportive work environment?
3. How do student conduct administrators describe their supervisory experience?

Methodology

Research can be defined as a "process of systematic inquiry that is designed to collect, analyze, interpret, and use data" (Mertens, 2015, p. 2). At its core, research is about asking and answering questions that help us better understand aspects of the world we live in (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017). Subsequently, how we view the world, the type of questions we ask, and what we seek to understand all influence the research design, which includes the entirety of the research process, from identifying and conceptualizing a problem, collecting, analyzing and interpreting data, and reporting the findings (Creswell, 1998). Simply put, the design of a study and each decision made throughout the research process, are influenced by the researcher's

philosophical orientation on epistemology, which focuses on the nature of knowledge, and how it is formed and validated (Mertens, 2015).

Epistemologically, a constructivist paradigm inspired the design of this study. Constructivist researchers assume knowledge is constructed by people active in the research process and that researchers should seek understanding of a lived experience from those who live it (Mertens, 2015). In other words, there is an interactive link between the researcher and participants. Within the constructive paradigm, reality is not absolute, but rather socially constructed and therefore subjective. Given such, constructivists strive "to understand the multiple social constructions of meaning and knowledge" (Mertens, 2015, p. 18). As this study aimed to understand the lived professional experiences of SCAs from their perspective, a phenomenological, qualitative design was employed.

Qualitative research commonly involves the study of things in their natural settings and "is designed to provide an in-depth description of a specific program, practice, or setting" (Mertens, 2015, p.236). According to Creswell (1998), this form of research seeks to understand phenomena and how people interpret or bring meaning to those phenomena. The methods used in qualitative research can be complex and are often non-linear, as components within the research process intersect and build off one another (Ravitch and Carl, 2021). In this study, the researcher sought to get rich descriptions of SCAs' professional challenges, workplace experiences, and supervisory relationships. Qualitative methodology best supported the design for this study as it allows the ability to include participants' differences and any contextual factors that contribute to their interpretations or meaning.

Within qualitative research, there are many approaches to conducting a study (Creswell, 1998; Mertens, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2021). As this study seeks to understand participants'

experience, a phenomenological approach was adopted. Phenomenology focuses on describing the interpretation/perception and meaning of experiences shared by individuals regarding a certain phenomenon (Creswell, 1998; Mertens, 2015). While phenomenology generally focuses on examining a phenomenon and the meaning it holds for individuals, phenomenological research can take many forms and is "in a constant state of becoming" (Vagle, 2018, p. 11). Given such, this study makes assumptions that are grounded in different philosophical traditions.

The design of this study was inspired by Edmund Husserl's concept of the "life world", or world of human experience (as cited in Vagle, 2018, p. 7). However, ontologically, this study aligns with Heidegger's notion of the "interconnectedness" of one's mind and world, through lived experience, which cannot and should not be bracketed for the sake of interpretation (Laverty, 2003; Vagle, 2018). This is significant, as it challenges one's ability to step outside of pre-understanding, or set aside pre-judgements, to capture the essence of the experiences being studied (Creswell, 1998; Ravitch & Carl, 2021; Vagle, 2018; Wilson, 2015). In this study, the researcher did not use phenomenological reduction or bracketing to suspend pre-judgements and understandings. Instead, the researcher engaged in a process of consistently "naming and questioning pre-judgements" and how they impacted the researcher's interpretation (Vagle, 2018, p.14). Dahlberg (2006) referred to this process as "bridling" (p.16) and conceptualized it to emphasize researcher reflexivity throughout the research process. As this study engaged interpretive phenomenology, it was important to provide transparency regarding the researcher's interpretations and existing knowledge, versus attempting to bracket or suspend them. Therefore, prior to conducting the study, the researcher provided a transparent reflexivity statement, illuminating their position and closeness to the phenomenon. In addition, the researcher used a

journal throughout the data collection process to note emotions, and self-reactions to interview answers.

Researcher's Role and Positionality

In qualitative methods, the researcher serves as the instrument used to collect and analyze data (Creswell, 1998; Ravitch & Carl, 2021). As this study used in-depth interviews to collect data, the researcher served as the instrument for every aspect of data collection and analysis, including designing the study, developing the interview protocol, recruiting participants, conducting the interviews, analyzing the data, and presenting the findings. Because of the researcher's involvement in the study, the researcher's existing knowledge and pre-understandings of the phenomenon have the potential to influence how data is interpreted within this study. According to Ravitch and Carl (2021), understanding the relationship between the researcher and what is studied, is important in understanding the study.

Vagle (2018) defined researcher reflexivity as "consistently examining how one's positionality, perspective, backgrounds, and insights, all influence all aspects of a study" (p.14). Central to conducting this study, was the researcher's ability to balance being reflexive and self-aware of pre-existing knowledge of the phenomenon with maintaining enough distance to observe the phenomenon in its natural setting (Finlay, 2008). This balancing act was accomplished by being transparent about my positionality throughout the research process.

I am currently the chief SCA at my institution and while conduct is not my primary job responsibility, I am responsible for oversight of the office/functional area and play a role in the conduct process. I serve as an appellate officer, develop policy, and implement any interim safety measures such as suspensions, restrictions from designated areas, and no contact orders. In my previous role, I served as a sole SCA and was responsible for administering every aspect of

the student conduct system, including developing and revising policy, investigating, and resolving complaints, training individual hearing officers and hearing boards, and managing student conduct records. In both my current and previous role, and for nearly a decade I have served in a professional capacity that is closely positioned to the phenomenon being studied. Also worth noting, are my salient identities as a black, male SCA and my role at the institution as a chief SCA with student conduct as a primary area of oversight and my previous role as a one-person office with student conduct as my direct job responsibility. Each of the previous mentioned, albeit in different ways, has contributed to my perception of SCA as complex and challenging work.

As a black male, I am conscious of systems and the inequities they often perpetuate and administer student conduct through a social justice lens. Therefore, in addition to investigating and resolving cases, I also confront inequities at every level of the system I administer, such as bias incident reporting/writing and exclusive policy language. Also, as the sole SCA at my institution, there are times when I perceive the work as isolated and feel like it's being done in the shadows. As student conduct practice involves cases that present individual and community safety concerns, the work is heavy in nature. Subsequently, I believe the weight of this work should be considered when structuring the offices responsible for carrying it out as well as the resources allocated to those offices to do such. In addition to student conduct, I have worked in a variety of areas within higher education, including athletics, residence life, diversity and inclusion programming, international student services, and campus programming, none of which required as much learning, attention to detail, and self-awareness as student conduct. This functional area has challenged me more than others.

Given the amount of time I have served as a SCA, I have experience resolving a variety of cases, including those that involve high-profile students, public interest and media attention, hazing within prominent student groups, sexual misconduct, academic integrity, alcohol and drugs, and cases involving violence. I have a close understanding of how complex student conduct practice can be, especially when there are competing interests. I spent my entire first year on the job learning the legal parameters that I had to work within. Soon thereafter, as I began to work on different kinds of cases, I realized that each case type required unique knowledge and skills. As I continued working in the field, it became apparent that due to the sensitive and confidential nature of student conduct work and privacy laws governing educational records, much of my work was done in the shadows, which really bothered me. At times I felt unheard and unseen. It wasn't until I became involved in ASCA and began networking, that I realized that other SCAs had similar professional experiences and shared similar feelings. They too didn't feel as though people at their respective institutions, or in general, understood student conduct practice and all its complexities. This study aims to shed light on the complexities of student conduct practice by amplifying the voice of the student conduct practitioner; to delve into the professional "life world" of the SCA.

Given my experience as a SCA, I recognize and acknowledge that I hold a position that is very close to the phenomenon I am studying. Throughout this study, I will balance acknowledging assumptions that I may carry due to my pre-understandings with keeping those pre-understandings at a healthy distance. Later presented in this chapter, are several strategies I employed to do such.

Protection of Participants

Intentional steps were taken to minimize the risks associated with participating in this research study. Prior to the recruitment of participants, the interview protocol, and methods for data collection and analysis, were all approved by the University of North Carolina at Charlotte's (UNCC) Institutional Review Board (IRB). Also, prior to participation, each participant was given a consent form, informing them of the voluntary nature of the study and allowing them to make an informed decision to participate. Participants were also informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time, which would result in their data being destroyed immediately. To safeguard the identity of the participants, this study used pseudonyms when referring to each participant during data analysis and the sharing of the findings. The researcher did not collect demographic information from the participants. This was yet another step taken to protect the identity of the participants. One of the research questions asks participants to share information about their supervisory relationship. As this question has the potential to yield descriptions of less than positive experiences regarding a current or previous supervisory relationship, the researcher avoided using specific institutions, offices, and positions. This was done to further protect the identity of the participants, as some schools use unique, specific names for their student conduct office or administrators. All data collected was stored in a password-protected secured drive folder that only the researcher and their dissertation chair had access to. The researcher followed all IRB-approved research procedures in conducting this study.

Sampling

Sampling refers to the decisions a researcher makes as to from where and whom they will gather the data needed to address their research questions (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). As the

research sought to gain depth into the lived professional experiences of SCAs, participants needed to meet certain requirements. To meet the criteria for this study, participants had to be currently employed full-time as a SCA with at least three years of work experience. Also, student conduct had to be their primary work responsibility. This study excluded participants that were not currently working in the field as well as those that held secondary student conduct responsibilities, such as live-in residence life professionals, faculty, or those working in fraternity and sorority affairs. The criteria established for participation in this study was intentional, as those that administer student conduct in a secondary capacity are often limited to resolving specific types of cases and may not have the range of experience necessary to answer the research question regarding the challenges of student conduct work.

In terms of selection, a purposeful sampling strategy was used to locate 10 participants that met the criteria for this study. Purposeful sampling is a common practice in qualitative research, in which participants are selected because of their unique ability to answer research questions (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Further, critical to phenomenological studies, is the ability to locate participants that have experienced the phenomenon being explored (Creswell, 1998). A snowball sampling method was also used in this study, as research participants were asked for assistance in locating additional participants that met the criteria for participation in this study (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981, Goodman, 1961; Handcock & Gile, 2017).

This study was not bound to a specific site. Rather, participants were recruited from the Association of Student Conduct Administrators (ASCA) social media groups and affinity groups. The researcher developed social media-friendly marketing materials to engage platforms such as LinkedIn, Facebook, GroupMe, and Instagram, to share the recruitment memo and a link to the demographic questionnaire.

Data Collection

In this study, there were two rounds of data collection. Initially, participants completed a participant eligibility questionnaire, which collected information on current employment, primary job responsibility, and years of experience in the field of student conduct. This information allowed the researcher to determine if a participant met the criteria for the study. Each person that completed the questionnaire was asked to pass along the research memo, demographic questionnaire, and the researchers contact information along to other SCAs who they believed would meet the criteria for the study.

Once an interested participant met the criteria for the study, they were provided an informed consent form and given the opportunity to read it thoroughly, ask questions, and complete the form, prior to committing to participating in the study. Participants were informed that they could withdraw their consent to participate in this study at any point during the data collection process, and that if they did such, all data collected from them would be destroyed. Next, the researcher scheduled 60–90-minute interviews with eleven participants. Interviews were conducted virtually via Zoom, a secure video conferencing software. Transcriptions of the interviews were developed using a password protected transcription software (otter.ai) and downloaded to a secure password-protected drive folder on the researcher's computer, which is also password-protected. A total of 11 SCAs met the criteria for the study with 10 fully participating, as one SCA withdrew their consent after reviewing their interview transcript during member checks due to concerns about being identified.

Instrumentation

Interviews are structured, purposeful conversations utilized in research when the goal is to understand someone's interpretation of an experience (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Mertens,

2015). According to Creswell (1998), in phenomenology, interviews are used to describe the meaning that a group has given to the phenomenon being studied. In this study, the phenomenon being studied is student conduct practice. Given such, in-depth, semi-structured interviews served as the primary method for collecting data within this study. Semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to engage in a guided dialogue to learn more about the phenomenon but also allowed for the probing of specific areas based on participants' responses (Smith et al., 2009).

The interview protocol (see Appendix A) for this study was developed in alignment with the purpose of the study, to capture deep descriptions of student conduct administrators (SCAs) perceptions of challenge and support. Interview questions were crafted in alignment with the phenomenological design of this study, using broad, open-ended questions to allow participants to share their experience with the phenomenon as well as follow-up questions to probe specific areas and capture experiences (Smith et al., 2009). Examples of the open-ended questions included: "Tell me about any aspects of your job that you find to be challenging," "Describe what makes you or would make you feel adequately supported in your role as a student conduct administrator," and, "Describe the role of the supervisor in supporting student conduct administration" (see Appendix A). Examples of the follow-up questions included: "What types of student conduct cases are you responsible for resolving?" "What resources have been available to you in your current role as a student conduct administrator?" and, "Can you tell me about a specific time that your supervisor supported you as a student conduct administrator?" (see Appendix A). Prior to this study, the researcher conducted a pilot study to test the interview protocol, after which, questions were either eliminated or broadened to create space for participants to freely share their experience.

Data Analysis

An often criticized yet staple of phenomenology is the concept of bracketing or phenomenological reduction (Finlay, 2008; Vagle, 2018). Phenomenological reduction involves the researcher separating their existing pre-judgements and theories from their interpretations of the phenomenon being studied (Vagle, 2018). Husserl's (1970) phenomenological philosophy heavily relied upon a researcher's ability to separate from the "natural world and world of interpretation in order to see the phenomenon in its essence" (as cited in Finlay, 2008, p.4). As mentioned earlier, within this study, the researcher used Dahlberg's (2006) concept of bridling to offer transparency and reflexivity throughout this study.

Consistent with qualitative inquiry, data for this study were analyzed using thematic analysis (Vagle, 2018). Hermeneutic phenomenology calls for a deep understanding of language and how meaning is derived from it (Ho et al., 2017; Ken et al., 2017; Laverty, 2003; Wilson, 2015). Therefore, the researcher dwelled in the data, conducting rounds of reading each interview transcript to extract rich meaning from the language. First, the researcher read each interview transcript in its entirety and developed a word or phrase to capture the meaning of each interview. All interview transcripts were then read again line-by-line to capture lines that contain initial meanings, and while doing such, the researcher kept a journal and jotted down thoughts and reactions to information being shared. This was done to acknowledge the researcher's pre-existing knowledge of and experience with the phenomenon and to support a reflexive approach (Wilson, 2015). After the first line-by-line reading, the researcher determined if there was a need for follow-up questions to provide further clarity on some of the initial meanings interpreted. Next, the researcher conducted another round of line-by-line reading to extract statements from each individual transcript that provided meaning to the phenomenon (Vagle, 2018). These

statements were then placed in a document for review. The researcher then reviewed the notes document and began to highlight commonalities and place them into categories. The researcher then reviewed each category and revisited interview transcripts to capture experiences within the categories. These experiences became themes and which the researcher described using language from the participants. Last, the researcher reported each theme, while also confronting the thoughts and reactions journaled throughout the process. Saldana (2021) refers to this process as "analytic memo writing" (p. 58), and it was done to support reflexivity.

Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, validity, or trustworthiness, "refers to the ways that researchers can affirm that their findings are faithful to participants' experiences" (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). In this study, several strategies were employed to ensure trustworthiness. First, prior to this study, the researcher conducted a pilot study (non-IRB approved) to ensure that the interview questions yielded the data needed to explore the phenomenon. As Ravitch and Carl (2021) noted, conducting a pilot study, or "piloting" is a common way to develop and refine data collection instruments (p. 88). Also worth noting, through the pilot study, the interview protocol was reviewed by a content expert.

After each data collection for this study, the researcher provided participants with a transcript of their respective interview to review for accuracy. This process, also known as member-checking, consists of checking in with participants to see how they feel about not only the data they contributed, but aspects of the research process as well. Ultimately, the goal of member checks is to ensure that the researcher understands the data collected and that that data accurately represents what the participant contributed (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). The researcher used member checks to ensure that the data collected accurately represented the participants'

experience (Birt et al., 2016; Ravitch & Carl, 2021). As noted earlier, one participant withdrew their consent after receiving a copy of their interview transcript.

Because this study was conducted for a dissertation, the researcher also utilized the expertise of members of the dissertation committee to review data collection and analysis procedures to ensure they were in alignment with departmental guidelines. Throughout this study, the research methods were discussed specifically with the methodologist and dissertation chair to ensure accuracy.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. As this was a phenomenological study, the data presented represented the researcher's interpretation of the participants interpretation of their experience, which will then be interpreted by whomever reads this study (Vagle, 2018). Therefore, the findings of this study were limited to the researcher's interpretation of the data.

As this study is qualitative, it is limited in terms of transferability, or the ability of "readers of the research to make judgments based on similarities and differences when comparing the research situation to their own" (Mertens, 2015, p. 271). As this study explored the experiences of a small sample of SCAs, its findings are not representative of the entire community, and thus limited in terms of being applicable to SCAs across the board. As many of the participants were found using the ASCA membership directory, by default, this may have eliminated participants working at institutions that do not fiscally support membership within professional associations or those that encourage participation in larger more broad student affairs professional organizations such as National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) or The American College Personnel Association (ACPA).

Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the methodology used to conduct this phenomenological, qualitative study, including the paradigm or worldview that inspired it, a rationale for each element of its design, and the positionality of the researcher in relation to the study. As the researcher sought to better understand the lived professional experiences of student conduct administrators, criteria for participation were determined based on the research questions, and a combination of purposeful and snowball sampling was used to locate participants that could provide thick description of their work as a SCA (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Also presented in this chapter were methods for data collection and analysis, whereas in-depth interviews were conducted to capture rich descriptions and data were analyzed using phenomenological reduction and thematic analysis. Next, Chapter 4 will present analysis of the data collected, including the themes that emerged.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to gain depth into the lived professional experiences of SCAs and to better understand how to support administrators within this functional area. The following research questions guided this study:

1. What do student conduct administrators perceive to be the most challenging aspects of their job?
2. How do student conduct administrators describe a supportive work environment?
3. How do student conduct administrators describe their supervisory experience?

This chapter will summarize the procedures used for data analysis and present the findings of the study, by providing a summary of participants demographic profiles and then describing the themes that emerged for each research question.

Procedure Summary

Semi-structured interviews were used to capture the professional experiences of SCAs from different institutional types. Thematic analysis was then conducted to identify themes based on shared experiences between participants and the purpose of the study. After conducting this study, it became clear that SCAs navigate a complex work environment and have to manage and resolve challenging cases. It was also evident that supervisors play a critical role in nurturing supportive work environments for SCAs and that SCAs professional network/community whether on campus or off, provides tremendous support.

Data analysis for this study was conducted in a non-linear, circular fashion that involved multiple rounds of reviewing the data set to capture descriptions, taking notes across the interview questions, and comparing responses to identify themes (Creswell, 1998). The researcher began by re-visiting the purpose, problem statement, and research questions prior to

reviewing interview transcripts. Each transcript was reviewed multiple times to identify themes, with the researcher highlighting quotes to support each theme. The audio recordings of each interview were reviewed multiple times to capture notes and highlights from each interview. After notes were completed for each interview, a question-by-question comparison was conducted, and common responses were highlighted to solidify themes and capture quotes that supported each theme. After the secondary review was conducted for both the interview transcripts and audio recordings of the interview, personal responses to questions and information shared during interviews were noted in a separate journal.

Participant Summary

A total of 10 student conduct administrators participated in this study. As this study was designed to capture and highlight common or shared experiences of SCAs, steps were taken to protect the confidentiality of the participants. Participants were assigned pseudonyms, and no demographic or institutional information was collected. Each participant met the criteria of holding a position whereas student conduct was the primary job function and having had at least 3 years of professional experience in student conduct.

Table 1

Participant Summary

Pseudonym	Years of Experience
Bonita	3-5
Christina	6-10
Corey	6-10
Kelsey	10+

Table 1 *Participant Summary* (Continued)

Marlon	6-10
Paul	3-5
Pedro	6-10
Rebecca	3-5
Wallace	10+
Wilma	6-10

Findings

After data collection, several themes emerged that show commonality between participants in terms of their professional experiences. All themes are organized by research question, with Table 2 presenting themes from RQ1 and Table 3 presenting themes from both RQ2 and RQ3. All findings are first presented in a table format with themes and sub-themes, followed by descriptions. Table 2 provides an overview of the themes and subthemes that emerged as it relates to SCAs perceptions of challenges, whereas Table 3 covers SCAs perceptions of support.

Table 2

Challenges faced by student conduct administrators.

Primary Theme	Subthemes	Description
Clashing with the Regime	• Colliding with systems of power and influence • Managing conflicting expectations	This theme represents student conduct administrator's challenges in navigating the political ecosystems within

Table 2 *Challenges faced by student conduct administrators*. (Continued)

Encountering Turbulence	• Positioned to struggle • Inability to ensure integrity • Bearing the weight of authority • Balancing layers of considerations • Learning on the fly • Tackling student organizations	their respective institutions as well as those within society. This theme represents the case-specific challenges that created barriers for student conduct administrators trying to overcome when attempting to resolve cases.

Clashing with the Regime

A challenging aspect of doing student conduct work, as shared by participants, involved navigating systems of power and influence within their respective institutions and local governments. Participants shared experiences navigating internal and external influences on their decisions within the conduct process, managing colleagues and their expectations of how a conduct case should be resolved, and/or the impact of how their office is positioned, viewed, valued, and understood within their respective institutions, on their work.

Colliding with systems of power and influence. The outcome of a student conduct case can involve a range of outcomes, from requiring a student to complete an online module on ethical decision making all the way to temporarily or permanently barring a student from enrollment and notating their transcript. Given the long-standing impacts student conduct outcomes can have on students as well as their families and SCAs pivotal role in determining those outcomes, SCAs report both internal and external influences on their everyday practice. Wallace talked about navigating the political landscape at the different institutions he's worked

at, and how important it was to understand who the "pseudo decision makers - the people who have the pulse of the campus" were at each respective institution. Wallace recalled that at one institution, it was "the Greek Life Community, they were heavy donors in the alumni world, and that had bought them some space to wiggle and maneuver; and when they saw things that were happening within the Greek community that they didn't like, they could push their weight around." At a different institution, Wallace noted that power and influence was tied to socioeconomic status, "it was money, how deep your pockets were, as a parent that could drive some of those decisions." Subsequently, wealthy parents can access high-level administrators and there can be "massaging of decisions in favor of the student" within a conduct process, "and you have to learn to navigate that."

High-level administrators within an institution also have the power to influence the outcome of a student conduct case. Wilma experienced this firsthand, as a senior administrator at her institution superseded the conduct process and not only allowed a student organization to submit an appeal outside of the appeal window but also granted the appeal and altered the outcome of the case. This was done despite Wilma communicating procedural concerns based on the institutions written policies, safety concerns based upon the organizations conduct history, and warning leadership about the campus safety risks of doing so. This exertion of power impacted Wilma personally, the institution, and the campus community. It created undue stress for Wilma, and she took medical leave as a result. In terms of campus and institutional impact, the organization continued with similar misconduct which led to a student getting injured and the institution being named in a lawsuit.

Prior to initiating a conduct process for an individual student, or even speaking with the responded, Wilma recalled receiving a directive, "you have to expel him", from a senior

administrator. After completing an investigation and preparing to resolve a student conduct process, Bonita shared a similar experience: “So when I did all of my investigation, I was going to drop the charges, because there wasn't sufficient information. That was the time that I was told that the student was not going to be able to return to campus.” In each situation, decisions regarding the outcome were made by upline administrators who were not intimately involved in the cases and SCAs collided with their authority in spite of having sufficient information to move the respective cases in a different direction.

While internal stakeholders can influence student conduct practice, external stakeholders such as lawmakers, politicians and state systems also carry a great deal of influence. Kelsey, who has worked at an institution that is part of a system, noted, “when one school within the system gets sued, it changes what the entire system has to do.” Kelsey is referring to the external influence and control that a college/university system exerts over not only its member institutions, but the policies and procedures at those institutions. Paul also noted that student conduct policies are controlled by the state legislature and described how changing those policies requires a “large bureaucratic mechanism to be moved and altered and it takes years and years.”

Managing Conflicting Expectations. Student misconduct can occur in every aspect of the University, whether it be in the classroom, residence halls, at athletic events, or in digital spaces the University occupies and operates. When an incident is reported, often both the impacted and involved parties have an idea of what the outcome should be and expect SCAs to produce that desired outcome. One of the challenges of doing conduct work consists of SCAs having to manage expectations and the corresponding pushback/resistance, when a behavior does not warrant the outcome desired by an involved party, or any conduct action at all. Paul referred

to managing expectations as “navigating tension” that exists between what different parties involved in a conduct case think the outcome of the case should be.

> You know, an example, a very kind of concrete example of that is, you know, if something happens to a student and the residence halls, and the parties who are impacted, their parents are calling and saying, you know, you need to kick this person out, they needed to be gone, gone, gone, gone. That's their expectation of the respondent, the expectation of, you know, parent or guardian, of the student who did whatever it was, they're like, they are a good kid. They just messed up, they just drank too much, you know, they need another chance…”

Paul shared that “dealing with expectations is probably one of the more challenging aspects of the conduct process or being in this role.” Paul’s example shows that SCAs not only have to manage expectations, but sometimes must manage competing or conflicting expectations.

Other participants noted managing expectations as a challenging aspect. Wallace was once told by a supervisor, “Conduct is a job that everybody wants to tell you how to do, but nobody wants to do it.” The underlying theme Wallace is alluding to is related to the anticipated or expected outcome of a conduct case. Further, Pedro attested that many of the expectations for student conduct outcomes are formed due to a misunderstanding of the student conduct process, “I don’t think a lot of people at the institution that I work at understand student conduct, so a lot of times they want x and y done, not realizing that there’s policies that need to be followed.” Pedro reinforced the theme of managing expectations when the outcome doesn’t align, “when I don’t do a decision that they like, then I’m the bad person.” Bonita shared similar challenges and specifically mentioned faculty, “So right now my biggest challenge is faculty, our faculty members are unaware of what our process looks like.” Bonita specifically experienced managing

the expectations of faculty as they transitioned from having little to no involvement in student conduct matters to playing a significant role in student conduct, particularly disruptive classroom behavior, “having to meet with students and talk to them has not been their favorite part.” The essence of what Bonita shared is that faculty expect every form of misconduct to be handled by SCAs.

While some of the challenges shared were perceived to be due to a lack of understanding, participants also shared having to manage expectations that were formed due to heightened fear or safety concerns. Christina shared challenges managing faculty with safety concerns, “so trying to get them to understand that every individual that's mentally ill is not dangerous. Every disruptive student is not going to be the next potential shooter.” Christina experienced faculty members requesting that students be removed from classes, and having to manage the fallout when their request was denied, “and so having to constantly sometimes tell them the outcome of something that isn't necessarily what they're wanting, they get, you know, really frustrated about that, or they may feel like we are not supporting them as employees.” Kelsey noted that, “mission and vision are not policies, and especially when it comes to public institutions and free speech. It is not necessarily a policy violation for someone to be mean and hateful.” Kelsey experienced managing faculty expectations, “so when they wind up calling the Conduct Office, they don't necessarily get there's nothing for conduct to do… You know, a student saying you're a terrible teacher, doesn't mean they're threatening you.” Marlon described his experience of being misunderstood, after providing a rationale to senior leadership for decisions made regarding a conduct case “it sounds as if you're defending the student, and they're not understanding that. And you sound crazy.” Marlon spent two years defending conduct outcomes for a particular student, because his conduct decisions did not align with faculty expectations. In

another case, the faculty member threatened to take concerns before University Senate and ultimately ended up pulling in academic deans, department chairs, and vice presidents. Marlon found this to be extremely disruptive, as it pulled his attention away from responding to actual misconduct.

Positioned to struggle. One of the challenges shared by SCAs involved navigating their respective institutions when the student conduct functional area is undervalued, as communicated by its position on campus. How a student conduct office is positioned within the institution includes how it is generally perceived on campus, its physical location, and the resources, both human and fiscal, allocated to the area. Participants shared common challenges in executing their work, when their office is solely viewed as the place to send issues and challenges.

When it's common practice for the campus community to refer all of its challenging and problematic students to the conduct office, it creates logjams of incidents and situations to filter through and determine which referrals are appropriate and which should be handled by another office on campus. Several participants referred to this as "dumping" and shared difficulties navigating the perception that their office's sole purpose is to deal with problematic students, and then manage the "dumping" that occurs as a result. Essentially, every problematic student on campus has not violated a campus policy. As Kelsey stated, "It is not necessarily a policy violation for someone to be mean and hateful…Someone just being a jackass is not a policy violation." Beyond campus perception, Bonita also talked about the office functioning in a manner that bolstered community perceptions, explaining, "we function like the principal's office, and I'm trying to break that stigma." Christina experienced similar challenges and explained, "I think one of the challenges that I had when I first got here was getting folks, staff and faculty to recognize that this office was a resource, and not just where you go and dump the

problematic students, because it was kind of always like, Oh, the student is problematic, send them to conduct." Christina emphasized the need to educate the community on what constitutes a conduct referral and learned to make recommendations and provide a rationale vs. "just telling folks no" if a referral does not rise to the level of a student conduct violation.

Another challenge noted by participants involved was how they believe conduct offices are highlighted and supported at their respective institutions in relation to other offices on campus. In relation to other offices on campus, Corey described the conduct office as being "in the background..." Corey explained that the student conduct office website was difficult to find, "if you go on to the Division of Student Affairs website, you have to really search to find Student Conduct. It's not something that's up in center." Corey also described the physical location of the office as being "hidden away" and "intimidating." On a similar note, Marlon experienced requesting and being denied a table at a preview day by the admissions staff. Marlon advocated for a table to share resources and "demystify the process" given the conduct office's responsibility to "keep students safe" and make sure they are having a "healthy experience." The challenge, as shared by Marlon, was "trying to change my colleagues' minds about the work that I do, and what we do..." Last, Wallace attributed a conduct office's ability to engage in "programmatic efforts" as an indicator of how it is valued by the institution, noting that "institutions that value conduct allocate resources to it and allow outreach..."

When an institution has not invested resources in this functional area, not only it can make it highly challenging for SCAs to execute their job but also increase institutional risk. Pedro spoke directly to this challenge as he experienced working at an institution that did not have student conduct management software. To put things in perspective, this type of software was piloted after the tragedy at Virginia Tech which occurred in 2007. Not having access to

conduct management software forced Pedro to manually track conduct records and sanctions, as well as manually develop his own letters, all of which are administrative tasks.

Wilma shared that many SCAs pay for professional development out of their own pocket and believes that SCAs should have access to continuing professional development given the ever-evolving nature of policies, regulations, and legislation that impacts the field. Wallace spoke more so to challenges involving human resources and staffing, noting that "conduct numbers can swell and balloon", even beyond a well-staffed office. Corey shared similar sentiments and shared concerns about filling student conduct positions given the impacts of the pandemic and the great resignation as well as burnout with the current staff.

Encountering Turbulence

The nature of student conduct work is layered and unpredictable. When resolving a case, SCAs often must consider the accused student's individual wellness, the safety of each party involved including themselves, legal risks, and ramifications, as well as their own personal safety. Given the unpredictable nature of human and student behavior, there are times when SCAs must engage in research to better understand the particulars of a case and how to investigate and resolve it. Subsequently, there can be a process of learning that takes place prior to launching an investigation; adding yet another phase/component to the resolution process. Each of the above-mentioned challenges makes the resolution of conduct cases challenging.

Inability to ensure integrity. Throughout the study, it became evident that SCAs understand the amount of authority they have and how their decisions can impact students. As a result, it is very important to SCAs that students going through the conduct process are treated with integrity. Participants shared common experiences of having to resolve cases in a manner that they did not agree with as well as carrying the burden of making decisions that could have

lasting effects on students emotional and mental well-being and ability to obtain a degree. Each of the previous-mentioned experiences caused SCAs to experience significant, personal stress.

Whether it be a student being treated unfairly given the facts of their case or issued sanctions that don't align with similar violations, SCAs described their work as challenging when they could not ensure the integrity of their process, or if the student conduct process caused student's additional harm. Pedro's office is responsible for conducting the hearings for Title IX cases, which are investigated by another office on campus. Subsequently, Pedro talked about having to resolve a case, which after the incident was reported, took two semesters to get to the office. Pedro was frustrated with how students were treated in this case.

> The biggest challenge is, you have students taking their classes, they had this case looming for over a year. And I'm just thinking like, you know, the mental health that's going into this as well, and whatnot. It should not take this long for me to get this case, like it should not take over a year. And I don't know if it's lack of staffing in offices. I don't know if people just put it on back burners. But it's not fair to the students. Because my biggest thing, that's probably a fault of mine, is that I'm like, you know, student-centered. And I feel like this is not a student-centered approach at all.

Like Pedro, other participants also experienced stress when they perceived students to be treated unfairly. These sentiments speak to a common desire of SCAs to treat students with integrity.

Bonita recalled having to suspend a student when the facts didn't support it and the stress that accompanied that action, "I was real upset about it for a long time. I cried about it just because I felt like I was doing that student a disservice..." Wilma shared a similar experience, in resolving a case involving a student that was physically larger in statue. Although encouraged to have plain-clothed officers nearby during meetings, Wilma was not afraid of the student, "he was

literally a teddy bear." Wilma did not like the way the student was treated by her colleagues, "black men that go through the system and they're immediately treated like they're guilty." Wilma shared this case as challenging and believed she could have done more to support the student. Paul shared a challenging experience in having to facilitate a restorative justice circle between a student and his supervisor:

> What are the ethics of this? Is there going to be any sort of like bias? … I'm obviously concerned about my job, and not that I'm getting fired, but right, like the dynamic that might occur following this. And my objectivity and whether kind of moving forward is more harm going to happen. Because that's a big kind of thing. That always needs to be examined when you're offering restorative justice.

Although Paul self-identified as a "conduit for a restorative process", the importance of ensuring the student conduct process was administered with integrity was a theme that emerged throughout the study, even if it meant being introspective or engaging in personal reflection. Kelsey shared, "I've really had to work on myself, and check my biases, check my own emotions, to make sure I'm being fair and equitable." Bonita acknowledged both the challenge as well as the reality that SCAs sometimes fall short, "I think that we all have standards that we have to uphold and I feel like sometimes that doesn't happen..." Wallace recalled working a case where two students engaging in similar misconduct during the same incident received different outcomes.

Bearing the weight of authority. Student conduct administrators must make judgement calls regarding how cases get resolved. Many of the resolutions can impact students' ability to graduate and/or attend college altogether. These judgement calls are not something that SCAs

take lightly, as several participants acknowledged the burden or heaviness of having the ability to issue such severe sanctions/outcomes.

Corey noted that, “conduct requires a different breed of student affairs practitioner, because of the nature of the work. It’s heavy and not the happy-go-lucky programming that you see across a lot of other student affairs roles.” Corey works in an office with staff members that are “burned out due to the nature of the work.” Corey shared plans to work with staff on compartmentalizing their work, so that it isn’t constantly weighing on them. Kelsey also talked about compartmentalizing to manage the weight of authority, “I'm fortunate that I've learned how to compartmentalize a lot better as I've gotten older, but especially given my role as the investigator as the person who has suspension, expulsion authority, that can be really heavy.” Kelsey maintains a professional insurance policy, given the impact a suspension or expulsion can have on student, “Is a suspension or expulsion going to necessarily stop a student achieving all they want to achieve? No. Is it going to make life a lot harder? Yes. And that is a heavy decision to make...” The insurance policy provides Kelsey with a layer of protection in the event a case results in the filing of a lawsuit. Last, Marlon acknowledged that burden when resolving a case that resulted in suspension, “Because it’s hard man, like we have a lot of authority… and you can’t take that lightly...” Marlon acknowledged the authority he possesses and therefore, tries to make decisions that are fair and well considered.

Balancing Layers of Consideration. Student conduct cases that involve simple violations such as first-time drug and alcohol (underage) possession, or minor theft are often cut and dry straight forward path to resolution. However, SCAs often land cases that are complex in nature and require tremendous effort and energy to manage and resolve. The essence of this theme is captured and supported by the lived professional experiences shared by the participants.

Several participants shared experiences that illustrate the challenges of resolving complex student conduct cases. Kelsey worked on a case involving two students, with both an institution issued “No Contact” order as well as a protective order issued by the courts. One of the orders was very specific and prohibited the respondent from going within a certain distance of the complainant. Kelsey shared that one party would intentionally show up at places where the other party worked to cause a violation of the distance provision of the no contact order. On the flip side, the other party would show up places and intentionally remain one foot outside of the required distance from the other as noted in the no contact order. The case required ongoing management of the parties and ended up in additional conduct violations for collusion. The layers of this case included managing legal and institutional mandates, managing each party and their testing of the boundaries, and resolving additional violations that included additional students.

Christina shared a few examples of conduct cases that were complex in nature for different reasons. Christina responded to a faculty member’s concerns about a student being potentially dangerous. Even after Christina communicated that the school’s threat assessment protocol determined that the student was not a threat, the faculty remained concerned and continued to report the student internally as well to external organizations. The student of course expressed concern about being mistreated by the faculty member. Christina eventually had to refer the faculty member to Employee Relations and coordinate alternative grading procedures to ensure the student was graded fairly. The layers of this case involved managing conducting threat assessment, managing the concerns and expectations of a colleague, ensuring fairness in academic evaluations, and eventually providing care and support to a colleague through a referral to Employee Relations and Assistance programs.

The other example involved a case in which a student hired a legal team to fully represent them during the conduct process. The student's attorneys were uninformed about the process and instructed their responding student not to speak, which prolonged and delayed the resolution process. Throughout the process Christina met with four different attorneys and leaned on the institution's legal counsel to provide support in guiding the case to resolution. The specifics of this case created a pseudo-courtroom and adversarial environment where both the student and practitioner were both supported by legal professionals, for which Christina had to navigate.

Complex student conduct cases challenge SCAs by requiring them to manage additional layers regarding the stakeholders involved. At times, due to personal safety concerns, the SCA themselves is one of the stakeholders that requires additional consideration and management. Rebeca and Wilma both worked on cases where they had to take personal safety considerations due to student responses to the outcomes of their respective conduct cases. After a series of unannounced, unscheduled visits with a student (respondent) demanding a different conduct outcome, personal safety concerns rose for Rebecca. As a result, they began the process of obtaining a protective order through the court system. Wilma shared a similar experience, whereas a student she was meeting with became extremely aggressive and she believed she was in danger of being physically attacked. Wilma shared that she keeps a miniature bat in her desk, "Good thing, I'm not afraid to take care of myself..." This comment implied an awareness of personal safety concerns that may accompany student conduct work. When a SCA is concerned for their personal safety, they must balance moving a case towards resolution while also ensuring that their basic needs are met; they have to self-manage.

Learning on the Fly. While personal safety concerns add an additional layer of management for SCAs, another case-specific challenge of student conduct work involved having

to engage in additional research and learning to investigate and or resolve a case. Several participants shared experiences in which they had to seek additional knowledge to better understand the misconduct to investigate or resolve the case. This additional layer of learning stretched SCAs beyond their capacity.

Bonita worked on cases involving major fraud, which required additional learning. One case involved multiple students purchasing credit card numbers via the dark web and attempting to gain a six-figure amount of fraudulent funds from sources across the country. To investigate the case and understand the severity of the misconduct Bonita had to learn about the dark web, how and why people access it. Bonita worked on a separate fraud case involving a student who altered their records and obtained over $50,000 from the institution over a period of time. Upon further investigation it was discovered that the student had a history of fraud that spanned across different institutions. In both cases, in addition to the actual and attempted fraud being criminal offenses, they also crossed state lines, which forced the involvement of federal agencies. Therefore, Bonita had to learn how to work with federal agencies. Both cases also involved reviewing dense files of financial transactions and records, adding yet another element of learning for Bonita, “it was just the amount of data that we got as far as from the investigation and going through that. It was like just looking at a different language at first...”

While Bonita’s cases involved learning about financial card fraud, the dark internet, and working with federal agencies, other participants shared similar experiences of having to learn additional knowledge about weapons. For example, Kelsey, who works in a state where students have the right to carry firearms, has had to utilize online resources to learn about different types of firearms and their typical use. This additional learning helped Kelsey determines whether to engage threat assessment protocols or if possession of the weapon for self-defense purposes, was

reasonable given the firearm. Rebecca shared similar experience in having to learn about firearms, ammunition, and even explosive devices. In addition, Rebecca would also have to learn to work collaboratively with a federal agency, "we had an incident that was stopped in action with 1000s of rounds of ammunition... automatic rifles, a couple of pipe bombs and just some really extremely disruptive stuff..." When SCAs engaged in additional learning to better equip themselves to resolve cases, the nature of the misconduct added extra steps in the process, some of which took significant time.

Tackling Student Organizations. Organizational misconduct, particularly that which involved Greek-letter organizations, presented yet another set of challenges for SCAs. Participants shared challenging aspects of both investigating and resolving student organization cases, as well as managing the involved parties, which include external stakeholders. Last, organizational misconduct can stretch SCAs beyond their capacity. For example, Pedro worked on a case involving two organizations that got into a large fight during the institution's opening week activities. Although the fight stemmed from one event, it continued throughout the week, to the point where Pedro had to issue each organization an interim suspension and then investigate. Pedro interviewed each organization collectively and conducted interviews with individual members, on-campus advisors, graduate advisors, and alumni members of the organizations. Throughout the investigation, Pedro received full cooperation from one organization while the other organization was not supportive or cooperative of the student conduct process; making it difficult to get the facts.

Corey also shared that hazing cases were one of the most challenging and recalled working on a case that took over a month just to investigate, "I feel like student organization, cases are way more challenging than cases involving individuals or a group of individuals."

Corey highlighted the number of students involved in student org cases as well as the propensity of even the victims to be dishonest. Corey worked on a hazing case that required her to conduct a lot of interviews, and the students were dishonest throughout the investigation and during hearings. Corey not only talked about the amount of planning and scheduling that goes into investigating a hazing case but also about the strategy behind it, "you always have to change it up…. because word gets around, especially within communities like, oh, well, this is what they did in our investigation. So, they may do it in yours..." This speaks to the "chess game" that conducting a hazing investigation require SCAs to play. Within organizations and small communities, news can travel fast, which in turn, can allow for organized fabrication. The cases must be investigated in a manner that does not allow members to create a unified story. Furthermore, investigative tactics may need to vary from case-to-case given organizations' ability and willingness to communicate with one another.

Student organization cases present unique challenges given the level of risk associated with common forms of misconduct (hazing, alcohol and drug violations, sexual violence, etc.). When investigating and getting the facts is challenging, the cases become difficult to resolve and dangerous behaviors could survive the conduct process. These cases become significantly more challenging when there are staffing concerns that also impact SCAs ability to determine if a policy was violated. The commonality with resolving student organization cases is that they stretch SCAs thin given the weight of the investigation, as well as managing the layers of parties involved with competing interests.

Support

Table 3

Student conduct administrators' perceptions of support

Primary Theme	Subthemes	Description
Nurtured by Leadership	• Being Coached vs. Managed • Affording Autonomy/Trust • Supporting Personal/Professional Goals • Enabling Work-life balance	This theme represents student conduct administrator's supervisor and their role in serving as a catalyst for personal and professional support
Leaning on the Village	• Empowered by Legal Affairs • Bridged to a Community • Linked by Common Interests/Identities	This theme represents the range of support received from entities outside of the SCAs direct supervisor

Nurtured by Leadership

When asked about support, every participant talked about their supervisor. Supervisors play a significant role in fostering support for SCAs; utilizing expertise and knowledge to guide SCAs through difficult cases, providing SCAs with the autonomy to do their job, ensuring psychological safety, supporting SCAs in goal attainment, and enabling SCAs to have a work-life balance. Each subtheme described below presents one of the ways SCAs reported their supervisors created supportive work environments.

Being Coached vs. Managed. One way that supervisors provided support to SCAs is by utilizing their expertise to impart wisdom and knowledge in guiding them through complex, challenging cases and sharpening their skills. Wallace recalled a supervisor that provided him with insight into the field, "you know, she gave me a lot of game… a lot of understanding of the conduct world, and really what it was like to kind of stand on your stand in your principles." This allowed Wallace to grow as a professional. Wallace also benefited from having a supervisor

with institutional knowledge and relationships across campus, as that supervisor was able to defend decisions (conduct outcomes) that may have been unpopular across campus. Wallace's supervisor was able to provide coaching and offer advice that stuck with him. Because his supervisor had also established themselves as a subject-matter expert on campus, they could make unpopular decisions without receiving the same level of push back as Wallace.

Like Wallace, Paul benefited from having an experienced supervisor that he could both learn from and lean on when needed. Paul attributed his supervisor's expertise in providing a multitude of support. Paul's office utilizes a case management software, to which Paul's supervisor serves as a super user, "It's making sure whatever conduct software is utilized within the Conduct Office, is set up in a way where it's doing what we all need it to do and performs the functions that we need to perform." Paul also talked about his supervisor being able to "push back and hold the line" with faculty a desired conduct outcome is not a possibility. Last, Paul spent time observing a supervisor interact with parents and was able to develop additional skills just from observing them respond to parent concerns, "she was great at asking questions and digging deeper to see what was going on. And through those conversations, sometimes we will learn that whatever the initial thing they said was, wasn't the issue." SCAs that have supervisors with extensive experience and knowledge benefit from being able to both observe and learn from an expert.

Affording Trust/Autonomy. Several participants indicated that being afforded trust and autonomy by their supervisors contributed to a supportive work environment. Based on the participants' responses, trust and autonomy build off one another. Therefore, they were lumped into one theme. Christina shared that, "support in this role is not micro-managing." She also appreciated having a supervisor that viewed her as the "subject-matter expert" and allowed her to

do her job and provide updates as needed. Kelsey talked about "really great" supervisors she has had and mentioned that they were not micro-managers. Corey shared similar sentiments, highlighting that "support for a student conduct area all boils down to essentially allowing them to work their expertise." Each of these responses indicated SCAs valuing having autonomy within their job and the role of their supervisor in providing it.

Marlon, Pedro, Wallace, and Rebecca all talked about trust and connected it to decision-making. Marlon shared, "the best way to define support is trusting our decisions", while Pedro simply offered, "Support is trusting me." Wallace attributed support to trust as well and specifically mentioned "trusting the conduct officer" when there is a desired or expected outcome that is not supported by evidence. Rebecca on the other hand tied trust to psychological safety provided by a supervisor, and defined support as "having a direct supervisor and leadership that believe in my good intentions and that if mistakes are made, that they are not made with bad intentions." Paul echoed similar sentiments, in that he found support in having, "the ability to make mistakes and be human and that being ok." The participants shared a common desire to be trusted by their supervisors and provided the autonomy to make difficult decisions. SCAs also value having their decisions supported by their supervisors, in terms of feeling supported within their role.

Supporting Personal/Professional Goals. Another way SCAs indicated their supervisors supported them was through goal attainment. Regardless of whether the goal was tightly or loosely connected to student conduct work, or not connected at all, SCAs described feeling supported when their supervisors allowed them to prioritize achieving/attaining a goal. Christina received support from her supervisor in completing her doctorate. She was allowed to leave work early to attend class and was even encouraged and nudged by her supervisor to leave

early some days to get writing done. Kelsey also talked about the tremendous support her supervisor provided her in attaining a terminal degree. Specifically, during the workday, if Kelsey had idle time, she was permitted to write or complete homework assignments. Kelsey's program also had an internship requirement that required her to log over 100 hours within a higher-ed department. With her supervisor's blessing, she was able to secure an internship in another department at her respective institution and log hours during the work week. Because she was supporting another department on campus, her supervisor considered it professional development. This made Kelsey feel supported, "I didn't have to take time off work, whereas some of my classmates had to take vacation time or had to work during lunch or after hours or on the weekends." Kelsey's supervisor also supported her goal of becoming a published author, signing off on her request to co-author a book, knowing that if her request was accepted, it would require additional time and energy. Kelsey's supervisor provided "immense" support by valuing her individual goals and supporting her attainment of those goals through action.

While each of Kelsey's goals were connected to the higher education profession, Bonita appreciated the support she received from her supervisor to achieve both a work-related goal as well as a personal goal. Each year, Bonita set a personal goal of decreasing her turnaround time between receiving cases and processing them. Bonita shared this goal with her supervisor and felt supported in accomplishing it. Her supervisor added reminders on her calendar and challenged her when she was not making progress and closing cases out in a timely manner. Bonita appreciated being pushed by her supervisor and grew within that process, "once I pushed myself and he also pushed me and supported me in that effort, I was able to see that I could do more in a shorter amount of time. I also just gained more confidence in myself."

Bonita also had a personal goal of being a homeowner. Her supervisor understood the importance of her achieving this goal, was "incredibly supportive" throughout the purchase process, allowing her to flex time to attend showings and even attending showings with her to ensure she didn't have to do it alone. The personal support Bonita received had a positive impact on her professionally, "supporting me in that way made me more willing to work…and dig deeper."

Another way supervisors support SCAs is by allocating fiscal resources to support professional development and the everyday function of the office. Paul felt supported because his institution has financial resources to not only support professional development but also to ensure the office has the equipment it needs, so that staff can focus on, "doing work rather than needing to troubleshoot something." Paul has not experienced wanting to attend a conference or professional development opportunity that could not be funded. Paul appreciated having the resources to attend a four-day training course on restorative justice. Kelsey also highlighted the importance of professional development and valued having the resources and supervisor support to attend a Mid-level Manager's institute and can attend webinars if needed or desired. On a similar note, Corey found value in attending the organizational misconduct track at ASCAs Gehring Academy. While Corey did not extract a lot of new information from the academy, attending reaffirmed that her institution was following recommended best practices. Rebecca shared a different perspective, in that she valued professional development but that she has not "seen a supervisor really identify like, here's, here's a conference, here's a professional development opportunity, here's a webinar that I think would really enhance this particular skill set." Even though Rebecca's response was different than some of the other participants, there

was a clear desire for intentionality on the part of her supervisor, in terms of identifying opportunities for growth.

Enabling work-life balance. Given the challenges SCAs encounter in their professional world, supervisors that are aware of capacity and workload, and are intentional about enabling work-life balance, foster supportive work environments for SCAs. Paul provided the example of receiving comp time or remote days the week after assisting with a weekend sporting event to balance out the workload. When asked to define support, Paul shared, "I think it's encouragement around making sure that we're taking like the sick time, the vacation time and the personal days that we need." Rebecca shared similar sentiments in that supervisors can be supportive in helping staff manage their case load, "I think being able to being able to flex our workload a little bit when things are overwhelming, has felt really supportive to me." Rebecca also appreciated a practice/procedure that was crafted to consider workload. Essentially, at Rebecca's institution, when the office is slammed with cases, SCAs can send automatic warning letters to students for low-level violations. These letters allow students to contest them if desired, but if not, saves the SCA some time as there is no required meeting attached to the action. Corey acknowledged the stressors of working in an "ever-changing environment" and shared that, "support is being able to support the balance." Corey also appreciated being able to utilize flex time if needed. Given the challenging nature of the work, supervisors of SCAs can offer tremendous support by offering work-life balance. However, to provide that support, supervisors must first be engaged and aware of case load ebbs and flows and then be willing to step in when SCAs are nearing or over their capacity and offer some form of relief.

Leaning on the Village

Supervisors without a doubt play a key role in supporting SCAs. However, beyond their supervisor, SCAs value receiving additional support from their institution. Subsequently, that support comes in different forms. This theme illustrates commonalities in institutional and non-institutional support received by SCAs.

Empowered by Legal Affairs. Many institutions employ attorneys to serve as legal counsel to support areas with significant risk or compliance requirements. With student conduct being such a legalistic field, it comes as no surprise that there is a natural connection between the legal affairs and the student conduct functional area. Furthermore, it wasn't shocking to hear SCAs talk about the role of legal counsel in contributing to feelings of support. Having the support of legal counsel allowed SCAs to move through their work with added confidence.

Corey worked on a "large" hazing case in which individual students involved "lawyered up." As a result, in addition to investigating, Corey had to manage a lot of open records requests which required her to locate and compile large sets of documents. In addition, she had to manage communication with lawyers, which can cause stress due to the concern of writing something that gets picked a part and/or leads to some form of litigation. Corey leaned on general counsel and appreciated having their support, "And so being able to have the support specifically from my general counsel, was something that gave me a lot of reassurance and ultimately, put me more at ease going through those processes." Having the support of general counsel allowed Corey to move forward with confidence in resolving her case.

Wallace shared a similar experience in receiving support from legal counsel after working on a case in which a student received an unfavorable outcome. Soon after, the student began to engage in stalking-like behavior and directed their attention towards Wallace.

Concerned for his personal safety, Wallace pursued a protective order through the courts and received tremendous support from the institution's public safety office and legal counsel. A representative from the public safety office went with Wallace to the police station to file the initial protective order and legal counsel accompanied him to the restraining order hearing. The hearing required Wallace to present information in support of the requested order, which caused him to feel stressed. With support from legal counsel, Wallace was prepared to present his case at the restraining order hearing. He was especially appreciative to have the support and the presence of an attorney at the hearing, as the student involved had an attorney present to contend implementation of the order. Wallace described this situation as "extreme" but shared that he had comparable levels of support on every case he worked on at that institution. The levels of support made Wallace feel that people "had his back."

Christina talked about legal counsel in a manner that implied support but from a different perspective, with legal serving as the backup role in the event a conduct case led to litigation. In other words, her decisions served as a line of defense to skirt legal land mines and legal counsel served as backup, or the last line of defense to protect the institution from litigation. This notion when she talked about her decision-making process, specifically mentioning that "the decisions that I'm making, as an administrator are balancing everybody's needs, but also ensuring that if something goes past us, we have strong documentation and a strong process that legal can defend our decision." Christina's conceptualization of legal counsel indicates more of a mutually supportive relationship between SCAs and their respective legal counsel.

Bridged to a Community. While legal affairs or general counsel offices typically provide on-campus support to the student conduct area. SCAs also find support off-campus through professional associations. These associations engage SCAs in learning specific to the

field but also serve as bridges, allowing for natural connections to occur. The Association of Student Conduct Administrators (ASCA) surfaced as a common place SCAs found support. Wilma described ASCA as "home" and notes, "being able to talk to other student conduct administrators throughout the country, to talk about different things and how they've handled it on their campus has been a great support." Essentially, the association provides SCAs with a network of professionals to consult with when additional insight is needed.

There was also value shared in getting involved in different professional development opportunities within the structure of ASCA. Wilma got involved in ASCA through committee work and valued this experience, as it allowed her to "see conduct from a higher level than what I'm seeing on the ground." Marlon mentioned serving on a committee within ASCA and valued the network that his membership/affiliation provides, "I think that's the best…The best support system and resource, really, to have doing this work."

Linked by Common Interests/Identities. Within the structure of ASCA there are communities of practice that group SCAs with similar interests or institutional demographics, the communities focus on institutional types (historically underrepresented institutions, community colleges, etc.), areas of practice (housing and residence life, fraternity and sorority life, etc.) topics of interest (Title IX, student organizations, gender and sexuality, etc.). These communities of practice allow for networking by connecting SCAs with similar interests and/or challenges. A few participants found support through ASCA communities of practice. Pedro shared that getting involved with ASCA through the "community of practices" has fostered a sense of support. Kelsey valued serving on three communities of practice through ASCA and lauded the resources available to SCAs through ASCA.

> "Because we have access to CAS standards for Student Conduct for free if you log into the website to the ASCA website, I think through my professional associations because I've been active, I'm connected to a lot of great resources, and connections and networks that I've really valued."

Kelsey has found her network to be especially valuable because she has lived in different parts of the country and feels connected professionally wherever she goes. ASCA is the glue that connects SCAs to and with one another.

ASCA also allows for SCAs to connect with each other based on shared identities. Each year, as a part of the ASCA annual conference, there are summits tailored to marginalized identities. The summits have led to the formation of affinity groups that provide continued support for SCAs even beyond the conference. Outside of ASCA, some institutions and even states provide support groups that create space for SCAs to gather and talk through challenges, get a head of legislation that may impact their work, and process difficult cases.

Several participants found support through affinity groups. Marlon valued being in an affinity group where he can connect with professionals that share a common identity. Marlon found the affinity group to be especially supportive when he worked at an institution where he was the sole SCA. Per Marlon, one of the benefits of being in the affinity group was being able to get perspective on cases from different levels of SCA. For example, when he served in a coordinator role, he could access a SCA that served in a director role through the affinity group. Wallace also found a deeper level of support within his ASCA affinity group, and felt it was a good place to make connections and remind him that he is not on an island doing the work. Kelsey is a part of two affinity groups that cater to different identities she carries. While only one

of the groups is affiliated with ASCA, she describes both groups as “very active” and has connected with student conduct professionals in each group.

In addition to affinity groups, SCAs found other support groups to be helpful. A few of the participants worked in states where support groups were formed outside of their respective campuses. Paul participates in monthly meetings with SCAs from all the other state/system institutions. During these meetings SCAs discuss policy and procedure and develop strategies for navigating new legislation or policy that may arise. Interestingly, SCAs at Paul’s institution also meet monthly with their counterparts at other schools within the athletic conference that the institution is a part of, to discuss relevant issues. Corey also meets monthly with her counterparts at other institutions within her institutions respective athletic conference. Corey appreciates having the space created by this group, “it's literally a monthly collaboration session where we're able to come together and essentially sort through issues that we're facing, and essentially talking through the strategies that we are implementing.”

Summary

This chapter presented a summary of the participants, data collection procedures, and data analysis. There were two main themes that describe the lived professional experiences of SCAs, challenges and support. Each theme included sub-themes to provide depth on the broader theme by capturing layers of both challenges and support structures. Chapter five will consist of a summary of the study, a discussion of the findings in relation to the study’s conceptual framework and literature, a discussion of the studies limitations, and implications for future research. Chapter five will conclude with a researcher’s reflection, conclusions, and a summary of the chapter.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The previous chapter presented the findings of this study, capturing themes and sub-themes developed from the participants' lived professional experiences as SCAs. This chapter will review those findings and discuss how they align with the research questions, literature reviewed in chapter two, and the study's conceptual framework. Next, I will discuss the implications of the study, provide recommendations for future research and practice, and present the study's limitations. Last, I will share a personal reflection, detailing how the research challenged and impacted my perspective.

Summary of the Study

This study explored the lived professional experiences of student conduct administrators, identifying common themes that describe their perceptions of challenges, support, and their supervisory experience.

The research questions for this study are:

1. What do student conduct administrators perceive to be the most challenging aspects of their job?
2. How do student conduct administrators describe a supportive work environment?
3. How do student conduct administrators describe their supervisory experience?

Sanford's (1966) theory of challenge and support and Winston and Creamer's (1997) synergistic supervision model (SSM) comprised the framework of this study, as its purpose was to identify challenging aspects of the work along with mechanisms that contribute to perceptions of support; specifically looking at the supervisory relationship within the context of support. This study helped identify challenges for SCAs that can inspire additional areas for skill development, building upon some staple literature on student conduct administration (Acosta et al., 2018,

Lancaster & Waryold, 2008; Waryold & Lancaster, 2020). My study also upheld the SSM as an effective way for supervisors to foster supportive work environments for SCAs extending the relevancy of several studies (Arminio & Creamer, 2001; Barham & Winston, 2006; Saunders et al., 2000; Sermersheim & Keim, 2005; Tull, 2006) that highlights that importance and effectiveness of quality supervision.

Discussion of the Findings

After conducting data analysis, four themes emerged that collectively address the research questions and align with the conceptual framework of the study. These themes are: (1) Clashing with the Regime, which captures SCAs challenges in navigating the intense political environments they operate within, (2) Encountering Turbulence, which represents the case-specific challenges that create barriers for SCAs attempting to resolve cases, (3) Being Nurtured by Leadership, which captures the needs for SCAs to be personally and professionally cultivated by their supervisors, and lastly (4) Leaning on the Village, which represents the support SCAs rely on from their network on campus and within the field. In this section, I will briefly summarize each theme and compare it to the conceptual framework and prior literature.

These four themes address each of my research questions, with the first two themes catering to RQ1 and the second two themes catering to RQ2 and RQ3. While RQ3 specifically focused on supervision, the data collected intersected with RQ2 which focused on perceptions of support. Given this study's purpose of capturing the depth of SCAs lived professional experiences, each theme was developed based on patterns that emerged from common experiences shared by the participants. The goal of this study was to inform support mechanisms for SCAs by amplifying the voices of the practitioners. In looking at challenges, there are two contributions this study uncovered that the field should be aware of, the exertion of power and

influence on student conduct decisions and how that impacts SCAs as well as the strong desire of SCAs to administer a conduct process that offers integrity. Subsequently, this study highlights the stress placed on SCAs when they cannot accomplish the before mentioned. In terms of support, this study upholds synergistic supervision as an effective tool and enhances the model by adding a component in recommending supervisors foster engagement with a community.

The themes I found within this study speak to a complex, stressful functional area that requires tremendous skill and resilience to navigate and highlight the importance role both supervisors and community play in fostering support for SCAs. This study bolsters the body of research on student conduct practice, by centering the experiences of the practitioner, specifically highlighting the political minefield that SCAs have to navigate on a daily basis, the value SCAs place on ensuring procedural integrity, and the immense support SCAs find in connecting within their community. In terms of supervision, this study upholds the literature (Barham & Winston, 2006; Berg & Brown, 2019; Jenkins, 2015; Saunders et al., 2000; Tull, 2006; Winston & Creamer, 1997) supporting synergistic supervision as an effective model.

Clashing with the Regime

Wilma shared, “if there's too many chefs in the kitchen then it starts to muddy the situation, and it makes it really hard to support and challenge the student in the way that they may need.” This quote captures the essence of the first theme and represents the relentless and often intrusive political environment that SCAs must navigate to do their job. The experience Wilma shared earlier of having an organizational misconduct decision overturned and the aftermath that ensued had a harmful impact on her as well as her institution. It was a lose-lose situation for all parties involved. While Wilma’s quote and experience speaks to power dynamics and the use of positional authority exert influence in conduct decisions, what’s important to note

is the impact this situation had on Wilma and how it aligns with the literature. Ward (1995) found that job stress can lead to low levels of morale, which in turn can lead to low levels of job satisfaction, which can then lead to attrition from the field of student affairs. Mullen et al. (2018) also found that job stress can lead to exhaustion and burnout, both of which can subsequently lead to job turnover and attrition from the field.

Another challenging aspect of student conduct practice involved managing conflicting expectations. Managing the expectations of faculty members was a recurring theme shared by participants, particularly when it comes to students who may be struggling with mental health concerns as well as students who are less pleasant to interact with. Kelsey talked about how students sometimes don't live up to an institution's mission statement or values, and how that doesn't mean that they violated a policy. Lancaster and Waryold (2008) noted that faculty are often uncomfortable addressing problematic classroom behavior. The findings would further support this notion as participants shared that faculty, in particular often refer cases over that are not policy violations, but rather issues related to classroom management.

Christina also talked about faculty expectations, especially when they fear a disruptive student will be harmful, "I think their expectation is, if I'm giving you a recommendation that I want the student gone, then that should be the ultimate, you know, outcome." Managing these conflicting expectations adds an additional layer to the case, which Paul referred to as, "navigating tension." While it's reasonable to assume that there is a level of "tension" between expectations with many conduct cases, the challenge for SCAs is when the tension becomes an added layer that must be managed in addition to resolving the actual conduct case. For example, when Marlon made a decision that fell short of a faculty members' expectations, the faculty member started making his "life a living hell," and he had to manage the backlash. Marlon's

description of this experience indicates that the situation caused him significant stress and frustration. This sub-theme aligns with the literature on job stress. Mullen et al. (2018) identified interpersonal conflicts and managing demands beyond a capacity to do such, as factors that contribute to job stress. Also, Winston and Creamer (1997) mentioned the impacts of workplace frustration, and how it can lead to turnover as well as attrition from the field.

The above-mentioned challenges align with RQ1 which was intentionally broad to capture a range of experiences. The data also align with the conceptual framework of the study which looked at experience through the lenses of challenge and support as mentioned in Sanford's (1966) theory. A crucial component of Sanford's (1966) theory involved environmental challenges, which contributed to the overall challenge needed to grow. Subsequently, each of the challenges the comprise this theme fall under environmental challenges as they involve SCAs having to navigate the political environment, while or in addition to, resolving their respective cases.

Beneath the surface of these challenges are SCAs' desire to ensure procedural integrity, educate students, and ultimately in a fair, humane manner. These desires align with what the experts (Brown-McClure & Cocks, 2020) who write, "The importance of having strong, clear, and fair processes enables the student conduct practitioner to focus on the learning process" (p. 25). While some scholars (Stimpson & Janosik, 2011; 2015) emphasize SCAs' need to focus more on learning outcomes, others (Neumeister, 2017) emphasize the need for SCAs to incorporate evidence-based practice to engage students as active participants in the process of changing their behavior. When SCAs spend excessive time managing stakeholders, it pulls their attention away from the learning process. While a major component of student conduct work involves compliance, Brown-McClure and Cocks (2020) note the importance of the campus

community understanding the educational value of the conduct process. This distinction allows the conduct process to perceptually remain separate from the criminal court process which is adversarial in nature. This aligns with participants' desires to change the perception (position) of conduct on their respective campuses, to move away from being perceived as the principal's office or a place where problematic students get sent for non-compliance. This position weaponizes SCAs and the offices they run. It also does not treat students in a way that considers the human element of making a bad decision. "The student conduct process needs to be supremely human just as much as it needs to be fundamentally fair" (Brown-McClure and Cocks, 2020, p.26).

Encountering Turbulence

In some conduct cases, the path from incident report to resolution is straightforward and clearcut in that SCAs don't encounter obstacles or barriers that prevent or delay them from gathering information, progressing through stages of their process, and ultimately delivering an outcome. However, there are times when internal and external factors create additional difficulty for SCAs, when trying to move a case to resolution. This theme focused on those barriers that SCAs encounter within the context of a conduct case that present challenges for SCAs.

One of the more consistently challenging experiences shared by participants involved cases in which they perceived the respondent being mistreated or the conduct process being conducted in an unfair, or inequitable manner. This perception overlapped with the first theme of "Clashing with the Regime" as in many instances there were external influences impacting the conduct process and its resolution. According to Brown-McClure and Cocks (2020), "The student conduct practitioner is an advocate for the rights of both students and the institution" (p. 24). Central to understanding this theme is understanding the value or weight SCAs assign to

ensuring that students are treated with care and that the conduct process is administered with integrity. This desire aligns with the literature (Hudson et al., 2018, Waryold & Lancaster, 2020), that lists the development of a conduct philosophy that is both educational and equitable as an essential skill. Therefore, it is to no surprise that SCAs feel challenged when they perceive students going through the conduct process are being mistreated. Wallace's response when discussing the feeling of having a decision overturned implies both a strong desire to ensure procedural integrity and autonomy within his role. His quote summed it up perfectly, "That was you know, frustrating and you know, it took a while for me to, to work through that because it was like, now I feel like my decision-making is being questioned." This situation took a toll on Wallace and made him question whether he was, "fit for this work." I mentioned there was overlap between these two themes, as external power/influence was the root cause of the change in outcome, which led to the frustration.

Wilma had a similar experience, where she believed a student going through the conduct process was being mistreated, potentially due to bias and experienced frustration, because she believes that she could have done more to support the student. Wilma got to speak to the student and, "learn more about his life and some of the things that was impacting his decision making." This was important, because many of the people telling Wilma how to resolve the case had never met the student or had a conversation with him. Recent literature (Waryold & Lancaster, 2020.) talks about practicing student conduct through a social justice lens. Wilma's discussion of concerns implies perceived inequities, as inequity due to bias. This case still "sits" with Wilma often, as she believes she could have done more to "educate them" about the student or could have "fought back more." Although Willma works in student conduct, she is looking at things

from a social justice/equity lens, noting systemic issues and considering those issues as within the scope of her authority and decision-making ability.

Holmes and Anaya (2020) described SCAs as being, “seen by many students as the holders of the campus moral compass” (p. 119). Subsequently, when SCAs cannot treat students in a manner that they themselves perceive as moral, it tends to weigh on them. When Bonita was forced to suspend a student who she felt was treated unfairly, she experienced frustration that was two-fold, in that she felt the student was treated unfairly and as the orchestrator of the conduct process, felt as though she did the student a “disservice.” Further, Bonita felt that her supervisor abused their power. In this instance, there were almost two victims, the student, and the practitioner. In both examples, participants looked beyond the behavior to understand how personal factors and demographics impacted decision-making and circumstances surrounding the behavior. Schrage and Giacomini (2009) highlight the importance of SCAs understanding students don’t come to college as empty vessels, but rather having years of lived experience that shapes the way they engage with the world around them. Being humble enough to seek this level of understanding allows SCAs to truly be educators and not system operators per say.

SCAs’ inability to ensure integrity within their respective conduct processes caused significant stress and weighed on them personally. Bonita for example, specifically talked about how she “beat” herself up about doing the student a “disservice”. She also talked about how “other things were at play”. I interpreted this as an acknowledgement of systemic issues. The undertone of this shared experience aligns with the literature. According to Lopez-Phillips and Trageser (2008), “Conduct officers often find themselves at the intersections of power and privilege” (p. 119). The scholars emphasize the importance of understanding students’ social identities and how they can both privilege and marginalize students in different settings. For

example, when Marlon spent years defending his decisions regarding a student, he was well aware of how systems of power can marginalize students, and worked diligently to ensure the student was treated in a just and equitable manner. Lopez-Phillips and Trageser (2008) specifically acknowledge both the power of a SCA to, "significantly change a student's reality" and the responsibility of a SCA to, "render caring and just decisions" (p.121). Again, in Bonita's case, she recognized her level of authority and was disappointed when she could not impact an outcome, she perceived to be just. Wilma's experience, as shared in the previous chapter, caused her stress when she saw how a respondent was being judged and treated, prior to developing an understanding of the facts surrounding the case. Holmes and Anaya (2020) also talked about the need for SCAs to implement "social justice" into their work to, "practice a culture of care and acknowledgement of difference while also maintaining a fair process" (p.109). Incorporating social justice principles into student conduct work was a recurring undertone for many of the themes uncovered throughout this study. Scholars (Acosta et al., 2018; Lancaster & Waryold, 2008; Waryold & Lancaster; 2020) highlight the importance of understanding systems of power and how they can both benefit and marginalize students depending on their identities.

While the perception of inequity was challenging for SCAs to manage, there were other case-specific obstacles that presented challenges. Participants reported significant challenges when the nature of the misconduct required them to acquire additional knowledge to progress their case along, or if cases involved layers of concerns that SCAs had to consider and manage. This sub-theme aligns with one of the key assumptions of this study, student conduct work is complex and challenging. This finding also supports the literature reviewed, specifically the notion student conduct work is "dynamic" in nature; thus, requiring practitioners to engage in "continuing education, training, and development" (Lancaster & Waryold, 2008, p.17). learn,

Bonita's experiences having to learn about financial card transaction fraud, the dark web, and federal regulations regarding satisfactory academic progress (SAP) are perfect examples of dynamic learning. Wallace's experience of having to learn about a disability that impacted auditory processing is another example of how the field is dynamic in nature.

The undertone to this theme is that there is no limit to student behavior and thus no way that a SCA can be knowledgeable about every type of behavior or policy violation that occurs. Incidents will occur that force SCAs to become familiar with new phenomenon and develop additional expertise. This sub-theme further aligns with the conceptual framework, as Sanford (1966) postulated that "challenge" occurs when there is forced innovation because of new challenges experienced within the environment. A SCA with a background in residence life/housing and knowledge of student development theory, having to learn and become familiar with financial card transaction fraud and or learning how to collaborate with federal agencies are both examples of forced innovation. Essentially, the process of learning never stops for SCAs, they must be flexible and ready to learn additional information and implement new skills in order to respond to incidents.

Being Nurtured by Leadership

The third theme, Being Nurtured by Leadership, combined results from RQ2 and RQ3, as all participants naturally spoke about their direct supervisor when asked about support. Whether it was Paul's supervisor ensuring the office's student conduct software is set up in a way to allows him to do the work, Wallace being coached by his supervisor to "stand in his principles", or Corey's supervisor recognizing her as the subject-matter expert and trusting her to do her job, it was evident that supervisors played a role in creating supportive work environments. This

theme also aligned with and in some cases extended the current body of literature, especially as it relates to supervision.

In terms of supervision, this theme aligns with the literature reviewed. Again, supervisors play a critical role in making SCAs feel supported. Scholars (Rosser & Javinar, 2003, Tull, 2006; Tull et al., 2009) have found that positive supervisory relationships contribute to perceptions of support and overall job satisfaction. Participants acknowledged and valued the role of their supervisor in helping them develop. Part of that development occurred when SCAs received coaching or advice that stuck with them, which partially aligns with an element of Winston and Creamer's (1997) SSM, two-way communication. There is partial alignment because part of "two-way" communication involves the supervisee also providing "honest and direct feedback" to the supervisor, which none of the participants discussed or mentioned, (Winston & Creamer, 1997, p.198). Another element of the SSM focuses on "joint effort" between supervisee and supervisor. While most of the participants responses suggest that they invest time and energy into the supervisory dynamic, there were a few participants that indicated a preference for hands-off supervisory relationship; to be left alone completely and have full autonomy to do their job. This would also contradict Arminio and Creamer's (2001) study on quality supervision, which postulated that quality supervision occurs "deliberately through an open, dynamic, and vital relationship between supervisor and staff member" (p. 40).

Central to the participants' definition of support within the context of the supervisory relationship was trust and autonomy, which is supported in the literature. Arminio and Creamer (2001) found that supervisors that allowed supervisees to be autonomous were frequently described as being a "quality supervisor" (p. 41). Participants' advice for supervisors of SCAs would further emphasize the importance of providing autonomy, however trust must be

established before autonomy can be provided. Further, for trust to be established, a level of competence must be attained, which also speaks to alignment with the SSM.

Supervisors of SCAs that supported personal and professional goals contributed to perceptions of support, which also aligns with the literature. Winston and Creamer (1998) list a focus on "growth orientation" as a vital component of the SSM (p. 33).Saunders et al. (2000) found that supervisors that supported their direct reports' professional growth saw positive outcomes as it relates to job satisfaction and employee retention, while noting that a "caring attitude and willingness to invest directly in the employee's personal and professional development" (p.189) were staples of the SSM. Tull (2006) found that just the perception of supervision holding a dual-focus can lead to higher levels of job-satisfaction. Winston and Creamer (1997) went as far as to say that staff have a right to expect support in accomplishing their personal goals as well as fulfilling the duties of their job. Participants responses also indicated such, as most discussed and provided specific examples of supervisors that focused on them accomplishing personal and professional goals as a contributor to support. For example, Kelsey felt supported when her supervisor allowed her to work on academic work during the workday if she had slow days and worked with her to complete her internship hours during the workday. Other great examples would be Bonita receiving support from her supervisor in accomplishing her personal goal of being a homeowner and Corey receiving support to attend the Gehring Academy, a student conduct institute.

Participants valued having work-life balance and shared examples of supervisors supporting that balance as contributors to feeling supported. One of the challenges uncovered in this study spoke to the Weight of Authority sub-theme and how the work can take a toll on SCAs. Connected to that sub-theme is the need for balance and relief, and how supervisors can

support the needs of their staff. Mullen's (2018) study would support this theme, in that it highlights supervisor's role in alleviating job stress and burnout. In a field like student conduct with substantial risk and safety implications, supervisors should prioritize the wellbeing of their staff.

Leaning on the Village

This theme focused on the common experience of SCAs finding support within a community. Given the legalistic and semi-litigious nature of student conduct practice, it was to no surprise that there was a relationship between SCAs and legal counsel. I also wasn't surprised that SCAs found tremendous support within the community of practitioners. Participants found consulting with other SCAs to get a second opinion on cases to be supportive. Both Wallace and Bonita had go-to people they would consult with to get a second opinion on cases. Paul and Corey were both part of conduct support groups based on their respective institution's athletic conferences. This particular finding was a unique finding of the study and not represented in the literature reviewed.

Involvement with professional associations was valued by participants and highlighted in literature focused on risk management. According to Miller and Sorochty (2015), professional associations, "contribute to the establishment of best practice in student affairs and establish norms for performance and outcomes of the work" (p.67). All but one participant, Bonita, was connected to ASCA and found that to be a valuable experience. Kelsey served on three communities of practice within ASCA and Wilma served as a board member at one point. Barham and Winston's (2006) study looked to supervisory needs from both supervisors and supervisees. In speaking with supervisors, they found that supervisors believed it was a part of their role to "facilitate and create opportunity" for engagement in professional conferences,

campus committees, and networking opportunities outside of the department (p. 75). Findings from participants aligned with this study, in that SCAs gained tremendous perspective and professional development opportunities through involvement outside of the office. Sermersheim and Keim (2005) looked at skills and professional development needs of mid-level managers and found that "conferences, discussions with colleagues, and workshops" were heavily valued (p.46.) While not all the participants were mid-level managers, all participants but one placed tremendous value in connecting with the community of practitioners.

Limitations

As it was important to ensure the participants' anonymity, by design, this study did not collect demographic information about the participants, the structure of their offices, or the type of institution they work at. As a result, there were several limitations to this study. First, there was no demographic information collected about the participants. Therefore, aside from observation I cannot truly ascertain how diverse the sample of participants was. Second, I did not collect information regarding office size or structure. While some of this information was naturally shared during interviews, not having collected it in an intentional systematic manner limited my ability to identify trends based on structure. The findings allude to structure possibly playing a role in how the political climate of a campus comes into play regarding conduct decisions. Third, while information regarding the participants institutional type was shared during the interview, I did not collect institutional demographics, thus limiting my ability to identify trends based on institutional types. Based on the findings of Clashing with the Regime, it's possible that certain types of institutions may lend themselves to stronger politics.

This study is also limited in that it didn't capture the experiences of newer SCAs. By design, I focused on participants that had at least 2 years of experience in the field. My intentions

were to speak with SCAs that worked in the field long enough for me to capture the depth of experience. There could be experiences specific to newer professionals that may align or conflict with the findings of this study. Essentially, the voice and experiences of entry-level SCAs are not represented in this study.

Another limitation of this study is how I interpreted and shared the findings. As mentioned earlier, I conducted eleven interviews and after doing member checks, I had a participant withdraw from the study. As a researcher, I was forced to prioritize ensuring the participants' anonymity. As a result, there were details regarding the participants' experiences that had to be modified, which impacted the richness of the shared experiences uncovered during the study. Some information had to be left out of the study altogether to protect participant anonymity.

Implications for Practice

The results of this study suggest several implications for student conduct practice, especially as it relates to supervision, staff retention, preparation, and professional development. Glick and Haug (2020) emphasized the importance of SCAs being well prepared to do student conduct work. Based on the results of this study, SCAs experience significant stress and challenges when they collide with institutional politics. This must be considered and incorporated in how they are prepared to engage in student conduct work. Therefore, professional associations should make intentional effort to provide training to help SCAs understand politics and how power and influence impacts decisions. For example, ASCA could offer a pre-conference workshop on navigating politics. Included in this training, should be an understanding of different structures of conduct systems and how to navigate them. For example, if an SCA works at an institution that is a part of a state system, it is essential for SCAs

to understand how the system may dictate certain elements of the conduct process. If SCAs receive this training on the front end, they can walk into positions with a better understanding of the structure they have to operate within and can thus be better prepared.

On the institutional level, schools can incorporate models of supervision that provide adequate onboarding to ensure that SCAs understand the politics of their respective institutions, including who has direct decision-making authority and who indirect authority to massage decisions given their level of influence. Depending on the SCA's position, they may be supervised by a director of student conduct or, if the SCA is in a director-level position, they may be supervised by an administrative dean, assistant vice president, or VPSA/chief student affairs officer. As it relates to conduct decisions being overruled or impacted, supervisors should make a good faith effort to identify and make the SCA aware of institutional authorities (outside of the formal conduct process) or internal and external stakeholders that can influence decisions. This level of awareness may help the SCA better anticipate political collisions and better navigate or avoid them altogether.

The findings of this study also suggest that supervisors can foster supportive work environments by centering SCAs as people in addition to practitioners. Winston and Creamer's (1997) synergistic supervision model suggests a dual focus on the professional goals of the individual as well as the organizational goals of the unit. Supervisors of SCAs can bolster this model by supporting their personal goals in addition to their professional goals. Some examples of personal goals include but are not limited to, completing a degree, getting a certification not related to student conduct, or even purchasing a home, or planning a wedding. Supervisors can support personal goals by offering flextime, stretching their definition of professional

development, and allowing a flexible work schedule that allows staff to do personal things during the workday and make up time at a later date.

Given the impact of the Covid-19 health pandemic on the work force, crafting work environments that attract and retain talent will be beneficial for supervisors within the field of student conduct. Supervisors can center the wellness of SCAs by being tuned-in with them personally and professionally. Supervisors need to understand SCAs individual values, workplace habits, and specific needs so they can prioritize those values and needs and tailor supervision to the practitioner. Supervisors should also have a level of awareness that allows them to manage SCAs' capacity. Therefore, they can quickly identify signs of fatigue and offer SCAs remedies before burnout occurs. Given the personal strain student conduct work can have, supervisors can be proactive and intentional about creating ways for SCAs to connect with a community of practitioners. The availability of professional associations such as the Association for Student Conduct Administration should be leveraged as part of the support system for SCAs. Supervisors can also create opportunities for connection by pushing SCAs to get involved with local and state support groups specifically designed for the student conduct professionals. Supervisors should allocate fiscal resources for conference travel and encourage SCAs to get involved within professional associations and support groups.

Last, given the safety implications and legal risks of mismanaging student conduct cases, institutions of higher education should prioritize student conduct offices and the professionals who administer the system. Miller and Sorochty (2015) note that anyone who has responsibility within institutional conduct systems must be prepared to "manage the associated risks" (p.172). Therefore, institutions should position SCAs to operate efficiently and at a high level by ensuring offices are staffed appropriately and equipping them with resources to provide, receive adequate

training and engage in on-going professional development. SCAs can trust their decisions when they are adequately trained to evaluate information/evidence, interpret policy, and fully understand the implications of their decisions. Each of the previous mentioned can be accomplished when there is an institutional investment in the continued development and training of the practitioners.

Implications for Further Research

While this study has implications for practice, several areas could be further explored to continue building a body of research that centers the practitioners. Given some of the challenges highlighted in this study, it would be worthwhile to learn about pathways into the profession. Is there a particular pathway that better prepares SCAs for what they will encounter? Additional studies could identify current pathways and possibly inform the development of intentional pathways into the field. I also recommend conducting additional research to better understand the personal impact of student conduct practice on the practitioner. While much of the study looked at professional experiences, there is an opportunity to look at how SCAs are impacted personally, including whether they are impacted by secondary trauma, and if and how they internalize components of difficult cases. Further research can identify trends regarding SCAs needs for personal wellness.

Another implication for additional research would include exploring the impacts of personal and institutional demographics on the experience of SCAs. While I was intentional about not collecting demographic information from participants, I believe this study could be replicated to include demographic information; specifically looking at how identity may or may not impact perceptions of challenge and support. Further, does institutional type lend itself to unique challenges. With collecting additional information from participants, this study could

also be conducted as a comparative case study, comparing the findings across different identities; comparing the experiences of SCAs in relation to identities (gender, race, sexual orientation, gender identity, etc.) to look at differences, if any, in how SCAs perceive and define equity and justice within student conduct practice, especially within their respective conduct systems.

Another area of research can be conducted to determine if certain organizational structures better lend themselves to interference within the conduct process. Student conduct systems often engage higher-level administrators as appellate officers, which through formal procedure may allow for decisions to be reversed or altered. Therefore, in addition to organizational structures, researchers should look at whether the structure of an institution's respective conduct system lends itself to outside interference. For example, if a conduct system engages the chief student affairs officer as the final level of appeal rather than a director or dean of students (if separate from the vice president), is that structure less likely to be subject to external influence, or decisions coming down from people with positional authority that do not play a role in the conduct process.

Last, there is an opportunity to build on this study by looking at the relationship between SCAs' perceptions of support and the importance of their role in relation to commitment. Boehman (2007) provided us with a definition of commitment that can be used along with Bender's (2009) study, which found that the degree to which someone perceives their job as important can correlate to their level of commitment within an organization. A study that looks specifically at SCAs and their level of commitment in comparison to how important they think their job is within the mission of their institution and the degree to which they feel supported, would further the body of research intended to center the SCA.

Researcher Reflection

Prior to conducting this study, I recognized and acknowledged my proximity to the phenomenon being studied. I served as an SCA for eight years and my motivation for completing this study derived from my professional experience and personal beliefs that much of the work of a SCA goes unnoticed. I felt as though there was a world behind the word per se, in terms of happenings on a college campus from a conduct perspective and also perceiving the job to be thankless. I went into the study with the expectation that much of what I have experienced would be somehow validated or shared by other practitioners. For the most part, this was the case. Many of the challenges I experienced were also experienced by participants, but there were a few situations I was expecting to hear more about and didn't. I expected to hear more about student organizations and the complexity that accompanies resolving organizational misconduct cases. Surprisingly, only a few participants shared mentioned student organizations. Threat assessment and targeted violence was another area of student conduct practice that I expected to surface. Again, I was surprised that more participants didn't share challenges related to each of those areas within the field.

Institutional politics was another area that I expected to hear my perspective re-affirmed. However, while conducting this study, I transitioned to a new role in which I no longer worked directly in student conduct, but rather had oversight of the functional area. When I changed positions, it added perspective to how I viewed institutional politics. As a SCA, I had several collisions with institutional politics, including resolving a case involving a high-profile student-athlete that my institution was invested in, as well as having a board of trustees heavily involved in student organizational conduct decisions. Initially, I refused to consider competing interests in understanding the position of my leadership at the time in having to balance managing up, down,

and across the organization. As I grew into a leadership role, I realized that politics were a lot more complicated depending on what interests were competing with one another.

Throughout the study, I felt intense emotions, especially when a participant would share something that I had experienced or agreed with. When participants shared examples of equity, or justice concerns, that resonated with me, as there were times in my conduct career that I felt disgust if not disdain for the way students were being treated or talked about. I felt intense frustration that our conduct process was suffering from the same illness as the criminal justice system, and while we were saying our process was educational, it was not considerate of people from non-traditional backgrounds or urban or rural areas. I had strong feelings that implicit and conscious bias had infiltrated and infected every layer of our system. Therefore, when I heard participants sharing similar experiences and perceptions, I couldn't help but feel that we are still working through systemic issues.

During interviews, I also observed several participants get emotional when discussing situations in which they didn't feel supported. This challenged me in a way that I did not anticipate. A piece of me wanted to offer comfort and a listening ear. I could tell that some of my participants had not shared their feelings, perspective, or experience in doing this work. This part of the study was validating for me, as my intention was to amplify the voices of SCAs; to provide a peek into the world behind the world as it relates to student behavioral concerns; to center the professional and give them the opportunity to be heard, because they deserve it. This study has also changed the way I supervise student conduct staff. I'm always mindful of the amount of positional authority that I carry. Subsequently, if I need to get involved with the conduct process, outside of my official capacity within in (appeals or administrative review), I always provide full context as to why I'm doing such. I'm also transparent about competing

interests and if warranted, reaffirm that my staff has done their job in following our process, and demonstrating a high level of care for our students. Another adjustment I've made in terms of supervision is being mindful of personal goals and crafting a work environment that allows staff to attain them, even if there isn't a direct or strong benefit to the organization. In summary, this study has allowed me to reflect and grow as a professional and leader, and moving forward, I hope to continue building upon the body of research that illuminates the experiences of SCAs.

Conclusion

As student misconduct and higher education both evolve, the body of research on student conduct practice, specifically the practitioner, must continue to grow and evolve. This study centers SCAs and their lived professional experiences; highlighting the challenges they experience in doing their job as well as the resources and mechanisms they find to be supportive. Through rich descriptions of challenging experiences this study builds upon the current body of research (Lancaster & Waryold, 2008; Waryold & Lancaster, 2020) by contributing additional areas to focus on for skill development. This study also upheld Synergistic Supervision (Arminio & Creamer, 2001; Barham & Winston, 2006; Saunders et al., 2000; Winston & Creamer, 1997) as an effective model.

SCAs play a role in keeping campus safe as well as managing institutional risks. Evident from the findings of this study, are the challenges that they experience on a day-to-day basis and what types of structure their respective institutions and supervisors can provide to nurture support. It is my hope that this study informs practice, in that it encourages institutions to invest in the student conduct functional area to ensure that SCAs are positioned to be successful; specifically preparing them to navigate institutional culture and politics. In addition, I hope this study informs those that supervise SCAs; reinforcing the value of synergistic supervision and

offering strategies for them to be architects of supportive work environments by supporting goal attainment, coaching SCAs vs managing them, encouraging engagement with the conduct community, and being tuned in to their needs for work-life balance.

Summary

Chapter 5 presented a discussion of the 4 themes uncovered in this study along with their connections to the research questions, conceptual framework, and literature reviewed. This chapter also presents a summary of the limitations of the study, implications for practice and further research. The chapter concludes with a reflection from the researcher and closing remarks.

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APPENDIX A: CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE FORM

Department of Educational Leadership
9201 University City Boulevard, Charlotte, NC 28223-0001

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Title of the Project: Student Conduct Administrators' Perceptions of Support
Principal Investigator: Anthony Davis, doctoral student, UNC Charlotte
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Ryan A. Miller
Study Sponsor: N/A

You are invited to participate in a research study. Participation in this research study is voluntary. The information provided is to help you make an informed decision on whether to participate. If you have any questions, please ask.

Important Information You Need to Know

The purpose of this study is to explore the lived professional experiences of student conduct administrators to better understand their perceptions of challenge and support.

Student conduct administrators with at least 3 years of experience in the field that are currently employed in a full-time role in which student conduct is the primary job responsibility are eligible to participate in this study. Participation in this study begins with completion of a brief interest questionnaire and then, if selected, a one-on-one recorded interview with the researcher conducted via Zoom. Each interview will be conducted virtually and will take 60-90 minutes and you will be provided an opportunity to review your interview transcript for accuracy. Your total, maximum time commitment if you participate in this study will be 2 hours and 46 minutes. You will only be contacted via email (adavi303@uncc.edu), and if you are eligible and selected to participate in this study. If you are not eligible or were not selected to participate, you will not be contacted.

The interview will focus on your perceptions of challenge and support within your workplace. Some of the questions you will be asked are personal and may cause you to experience emotional discomfort. For example, I'll ask you to describe work experiences where you may have felt unsupported. You may choose to skip a question you do not want to answer. You will not personally benefit from taking part in this research, but the study results may help us better understand how to support student conduct administrators.

You will not benefit directly from being in this study. Others may benefit because it is important to understand how student conduct administrators perceive challenge and support within their scope of work.

Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before you decide whether to participate in this research study.

Why am I doing this study?
The purpose of this study is to better understand student conduct administrators' perceptions of challenge and support. This is a pilot study being conducted as part of a doctoral qualitative research course.

Why are you being asked to be in this research study?

You are being asked to be in this study because you are a student affairs administrator with at least 3 years of professional experience working in student conduct administration.

What will happen if I take part in this study?
If you choose to participate you will participate in one virtual interview. The interview will ask questions about your experiences within your professional work settings. Your total, maximum time commitment if you participate in this study will be 2 hours and 46 minutes, which includes completion of a participant interest questionnaire, completion of this form, scheduling, the actual interview, and reviewing a transcript of your interview for accuracy.

What risks might I experience?
During the study you will be asked questions that are personal. For example, I'll ask you about times you haven't felt supported in your role as a student conduct administrator. You might experience emotional discomfort when answering these questions. I do not expect this risk to be common and you may choose to skip questions you do not want to answer.

How will my information be protected?
To protect your privacy (identity), a pseudonym will be assigned to your interview responses. Video recordings of interviews will be destroyed immediately following the interview. Audio files will be retained for transcription and then deleted after transcription. While the study is active, all data will be stored in a password-protected database that can only be accessed by the primary researcher. Other people with approval from the Investigator, may need to see the information we collect about you. Including people who work for UNC Charlotte and other agencies as required by law or allowed by federal regulations.

How will my information be used after the study is over?
After this study is complete, study data may be shared without asking for your consent again as needed to present the findings of the study. The data shared will NOT include information that could identify you.

Will I receive an incentive for taking part in this study?
There is no incentive for taking part in this study.

What other choices do I have if I don't take part in this study?
It is solely at your discretion if you choose to participate in this study. There are no consequences if you choose not to participate.

What are my rights if I take part in this study?
It is up to you to decide to be in this research study. Participating in this study is voluntary. Even if you decide to be part of the study now, you may change your mind and stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

Who can answer my questions about this study and my rights as a participant?
For questions about this research, you may contact Anthony Davis, <email address>, <phone number>, or Dr. Ryan A. Miller, <email address>.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to obtain information, ask questions, or discuss any concerns about this study with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact the Office of Research Protections and Integrity at 704-687-1871 or uncc-irb@uncc.edu.

Consent to Participate

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will receive a copy of this document for your records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the researcher using the information provided above.

I understand what the study is about, and my questions so far have been answered. I agree to take part in this study.

_____

Name (PRINT)

_____

Signature Date

_____

Name & Signature of person obtaining consent Date

APPENDIX B: EMAIL ANNOUNCEMENT

Greetings:

I would like to invite you to participate in a study exploring the lived professional experiences of student conduct administrators (SCAs) (UNC Charlotte IRB #). Student conduct administrators with at least 3 years of experience in the field that are currently employed in a full-time role in which student conduct is the primary job responsibility are eligible. Participation in this study begins with completion of a brief interest form. Then, if you are selected, a one-on-one recorded interview with the researcher, conducted via Zoom. The maximum total time commitment for this study is 2 hour and 46 minutes. Individuals that are eligible and selected to participate in this study will be contacted via email (<email address>). If you are not contacted, you are not eligible or were not selected to participate.

Intending to better understand how to support this functional area, this study aims to amplify the voice of the student conduct practitioner by capturing rich descriptions of experiences that student conduct administrators perceive to be challenging as well as those that contribute to a supportive work environment.

Attached to this email, you will find an informed consent form. To participate in this study, please click the link below, which will take you to a brief background questionnaire.
Interest Questionnaire
If you have any questions, please let me know.

Thank you,
Anthony Davis, Doctoral Candidate
Department of Educational Leadership
The University of North Carolina at Charlotte
<email address>

Faculty Advisor – Dr. Ryan A. Miller, <email address>

APPENDIX C: RECRUITMENT FLYER

APPENDIX D: PARTICIPANT ELIGIBILITY QUESTIONNAIRE

Interest Form - *Student Conduct Administrators' Perceptions of Support*

Thank you for your interest in participating in this dissertation study, which focuses on the lived professional experiences of student conduct administrators. The study is being conducted by Anthony Davis, a doctoral student at the University of North Carolina Charlotte. Solicitation is for research purposes. Please complete this brief survey to determine eligibility for the study. Individuals that are eligible and selected to participate in this study will be contacted via email (adavi303@uncc.edu). If you are not contacted, you are not eligible or were not selected to participate.

* Required

1. First Name *

_____

2. Last Name *

_____

3. Are you currently employed as a Student Conduct Administrator? *

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

4. Is student conduct administration your primary responsibility? *

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

5. How many years of experience do you have working in the field of student * conduct?

Mark only one oval.

- Less than 3 years
- 3-5 years
- 6-10 years
- 10 or more years

6. Please provide an email address that you can be reached at? *

_____

APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Protocol
Project Title: Student Conduct Administrators Perceptions of Support

Research Purpose and Questions

1. The purpose of this study is to gain depth into the lived professional experiences of student conduct administrators, specifically exploring the aspects of their job that they perceive to be challenging, and factors/resources contribute to perceptions of support within their respective role. Two research questions will guide this study: (1) What do student conduct administrators perceive to be the most challenging aspects of their job? (2) How do student conduct administrators describe a supportive work environment? (3) How do student conduct administrators describe their supervisory experience?

Background Questions

- Tell me about your educational background, what led you to work in student affairs, and how you landed in student conduct?
- What motivates you to work in student conduct?
- What do you feel best prepared you to work in student conduct?
- Tell me about the structure of your office.
- Can you also tell me what aspects of the student conduct system at your institution are you responsible for administering (ex. Investigating incidents, hearing cases, presenting cases to a board to hear, training hearing boards, policy development, etc.)?

Perceptions of the Student Conduct Functional Area

- Tell me about the purpose of student conduct administration. Why does it exist?
- What role does student conduct play at your institution?
- Tell me about a time that you felt satisfied or fulfilled while working in student conduct?
- What makes student conduct administration unique?
- If you could change one thing about the student conduct profession, what would it be and why?
- Is there anything about the student conduct profession in general that I haven't asked you that you would like to tell me about?

Challenging Aspects of Student Conduct Administration

- What types of student conduct cases are you responsible for resolving?
- Tell me about any aspect or aspects of your job that you find to be challenging?
- Tell me about a particular conduct case or incident that you found to be challenging?
- What made the case or incident challenging?
- Is there anything about your specific role as a student conduct administrator at your institution that you would like to share?

Perceptions of Support

- How would you define support?

- Describe what makes or would make you feel adequately supported in your role as a student conduct administrator
- Tell me about a time you felt supported in your role as a student conduct administrator?
- Tell me about a time that you didn't feel supported as a student conduct administrator?
- What resources have you found to be most helpful in supporting you as a student conduct administrator?

Perceptions of Supervisory Relationship

- Describe the role of a supervisor in supporting student conduct administration?
    - Can you tell me about a specific time that your supervisor supported you as a student conduct administrator?
- What kind of student conduct experience, if any, does your supervisor have?
    - Does it make a difference whether your supervisor has conduct experience?
- What characteristics of the supervisory relationship are the most meaningful to you as a student conduct professional?
    - Can you elaborate?
- How would you recommend supporting student conduct administrators?
    - What advice would you give to those who supervise student conduct administrators?