

CONNECTING WITH STUDENTS: A CASE STUDY OF DEANS OF STUDENTS AT
LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGES

by

John Cicchetti
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Committee:

_____ Chair

_____ Program Director

_____ Dean, College of Education and Human
Development

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Fairfax, VA

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A Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy at George Mason University

by

John Cicchetti
Master of Education
University of South Carolina, 2009
Bachelor of Science
Ursinus College, 2004

Director: Jan Arminio, Professor
College of Humanities and Social Sciences

Spring Semester 2018
George Mason University
Fairfax, VA



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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my wife, Kaitlin, and my baby daughter, Grace. The two of you are my inspiration and motivation in life.

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Abstract

CONNECTING WITH STUDENTS: A CASE STUDY OF DEANS OF STUDENTS AT LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGES

John Cicchetti, Ph.D.

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Dissertation Director: Dr. Jan Arminio

This qualitative study explored the experiences of deans of students at small, private, liberal arts colleges in relation to the meaningful and sustained connections they develop with undergraduate students. The research design was an intrinsic, single case, multisite case study with six participants at their respective colleges. Each participant served at their college in their current position as dean of students for a minimum of five years. Data collection techniques included stationary office interviews, mobile interview campus tours, participant journal reflective exercises, along with document and artifact review. An interpretive constant comparative analysis process illuminated four main categorical findings. The findings uncovered the impact of participants' previous history as college students; current institutional factors that impact their actions; significant attributes and characteristics that contribute to the ability to develop meaningful connections; and intentionally developed connections that deans nurture with specific

student leaders, organizations, and populations. Each category encompassed a foundation of multiple subcategories that were massaged out through the iterative coding and analysis process. The benefits of the meaningful and sustained connections to both students and institutions are discussed. Implications of this study are presented for both student affairs practitioners at liberal arts colleges and the higher education scholarly community. The study concludes with recommendations for future research to contribute to the small, but growing body of literature focused on the experiences of student affairs professionals at liberal arts colleges.

Chapter One

The Dean of Students position is a uniquely American role in higher education. It has evolved from matronly protectors of female students and fatherly figures of male students to vice presidents supervising a division of employees responsible for student success. The evolution of this position has evolved since its inception in the late 1800s in the United States higher education system (Appleton, Briggs, & Rhatigan, 1978; Dinniman, 1977; Nidiffer, 2000; Rhatigan & Schuh, 1993; Schwartz, 2010). The development of this position over time is linked to the evolving college student population in the country. The function and role of the dean of students mirrored the developmental and social demands of students on college campuses. Although a great deal has changed over the years regarding the scope and responsibilities of the position, deans of students have consistently played an influential role in the lives of students and helped shape the overall campus environment (Appleton et al., 1978; Nidiffer, 2000; Rhatigan & Schuh, 1993; Schwartz, 2010).

The deans traditionally served as the intermediary between the students and the administrative leadership of the institution. The deanship generally required individuals to establish policies and implement procedures to promote positive student behavior and a healthy lifestyle on campus (Bickel & Lake, 1999; Nidiffer, 2000; Schwartz, 2010; Tederman, 1997). The ability to foster mutually beneficial relationships with students has

proven to be a key factor in the success of many exemplary deans throughout history (Nidiffer, 2000; Schwartz, 2010; Tederman, 1997). Numerous approaches were implemented by the earliest deans to establish valuable relationships. The most effective deans made an intentional effort to directly connect with their students to better understand their complex needs in order to serve as the best possible advocate (Nidiffer, 2000; Schwartz, 2010).

Scholarly research on this subject tends to focus on either the experiences of the earliest deans around the turn of the 20th century or deans at large flagship public institutions (English, 2003; Nidiffer, 2000; Schwartz, 2010). The body of literature and overall narrative on deans of students at small, private, liberal arts colleges is generally lacking (Bouchard, 2014; Hirt, Amelink, & Schneiter, 2004; Tederman, 1997). Astin (1999), Hersh (1999), Hu and Kuh (2002), and Pascarella, Wolniak, Cruce, and Blaich (2004) noted the valuable attributes of the liberal arts colleges and the distinct benefits they offer students. The knowledge base of how current deans of students establish meaningful connections with students on the modern, small college campus has yet to be fully developed. There is a gap in the literature that requires additional exploration of the experiences of deans of students and their interactions with undergraduate students at small, private, liberal arts colleges and how these interactions are beneficial to students and their institution.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of my study was to explore the experiences of deans of students at small, private, liberal arts colleges in relation to the meaningful and sustained

connections they form with undergraduate students. The investigation illuminated a clear perspective on the role, behavior, and benefits of individuals in the dean of students position that enhance the practical application of student affairs services on the modern, small, private, liberal arts college campus. The study contributes to a greater understanding of an area that is generally underrepresented in the higher education scholarly literature (Bouchard, 2014; Hirt, Amelink, & Schneider, 2004; Tederman, 1997).

The enhanced understanding of this study contributes to a growing body of research and provides guidance for future deans at small, private, liberal arts colleges. My goal was to improve the preparation of future professionals who aspire to serve as deans of students at small, private, liberal arts colleges in the 21st century. A supporting goal was to illuminate the beneficial role these individuals play in the lives of students and at their respective institutions. Such insight allows newly appointed or aspiring deans to be equipped with a better understanding of the experiences and successes of those who previously served in the position. Too, this research serves to inform institutional leaders of the potential positive contributions deans provide at these institutions. The following research questions served as both the guide and the focus of this dissertation study:

- 1- How and under what context does a dean of students develop meaningful and sustained connections with undergraduate students at a small, private, liberal arts college?

- 2- What are the benefits of the meaningful and sustained connections between deans of students and undergraduate students? What are the benefits to the institution? What are the benefits to students?

I was interested in exploring the strategies and techniques deans of students utilize to not only develop, but also sustain and nurture these relationships over time. My goal was to construct meaning by joining participants on a retrospective reflection on the process of developing connections with students to further understand the dean's perspective. I accomplished this goal through qualitative research inquiry. Qualitative research, derived from the word *qualis*, is focused on the discovery of "what it is" (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2013, p. 89). Qualitative inquiry aims to understand the interpretation of experiences of participants through rich descriptions of the social world (Merriam, 2009).

The primary mode of inquiry focused on becoming expertly familiar with the lived experiences of those who directly serve in the position of dean of students at small, private, liberal arts colleges. A qualitative case study served as both the design of the research project and the product of inquiry in this study (Stake, 2006). A case study design provided me with the opportunity to focus in on exploring and understanding a case in a bounded context (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Stake, 1995, 2006). A case study report allowed me to provide empathetic understanding through thick description, experiential understanding, and multiple realities (Stake, 1995). My research study design was an intrinsic, single case, multisite case study (Anaf, Drummond, & Sheppard, 2007; Stake, 1995). The case in this study was the dean of students, which was examined at multiple

institutions. This research was based on a pilot study that helped inform the research questions and advanced my methodology. To begin this process, I examined scholarly literature on this role in United States higher education, the phenomenon of relationship development and nurturance, and the context – liberal arts institutions. Though I discuss a detailed examination in Chapter Two, I offer an introductory foundation here.

Background Information

The following section provides a brief introduction to the inception of the deanship in the United States higher education system. A concise summary of the evolutionary track of the position follows. An overview of the field of student affairs and current terminology used to identify senior-level practitioners provides a framework for the inquiry. The nature of previous relationships between deans and students will be explored from a historical context. In order to center the study, the liberal arts college will be defined along with an opening examination of its unique environment. All of the content covered in this prefatory section is explored in further detail in the second chapter through an extensive review of relevant literature.

The birth of the deans. The United States higher education system was founded during the colonial period and its architects culled direct inspiration from the European model of post-secondary education, particularly the Scottish (Thelin, 2011). For a period of over two centuries, these colonial colleges maintained a system of instruction and operated with a small number of faculty members under the direct leadership of a president (Thelin, 2011). In the late 19th century the title of “dean” was attributed to a senior-level administrator, generally appointed from the faculty ranks, directly

responsible for the oversight of student experiences outside of the classroom (Dinniman, 1977). College presidents appointed these deans to address the growing number of concerns manifesting in the study body population (Dinniman, 1977; Nidiffer, 2000; Schwartz, 2010; Thelin, 2011). The deanship evolved over the years to meet the demands of the shifting demographics of the United States college student population. The specific title given to the individuals in the earliest versions of this administrative position varied somewhat by institution, but more importantly, the name was based upon the impetus for the creation of the position.

The dean of women and dean of men positions were created to manage concerns directly related to students from those respective genders (Nidiffer, 2000; Schwartz, 2010). Around the turn of the 19th century in 1892, the first dean of women was appointed at the University of Chicago in response to the growing female enrollment at that institution (Gerda, 2006; Nidiffer, 2000; Schwartz 1997). The rise of coeducation was based largely on the need for additional tuition revenue to offset the swelling operating costs at many institutions (Gerda, 2006; Nidiffer, 2000; Schwartz 1997). The deans of women played a pivotal role in overseeing the student experience and served as advocates for the academic and social rights of female students on campus (Gerda, 2006; Nidiffer, 2000; Schwartz 1997). The establishment of the dean of men position to oversee the experiences of male students was in direct response to the success of their female predecessors (Nidiffer, 2000; Schwartz, 2010).

The continued expansion and diversification of student enrollments based on factors such as the The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, commonly known as the

GI Bill, forced the deanship to evolve into the dean of students position (Nidiffer, 2000; Rhatigan & Schuh, 1993; Schwartz, 2010; Thelin, 2011). Later in the mid 20th century, institutions abandoned gender-specific positions for a more generalized title and overall approach to working with all students regardless of gender (Appleton et al., 1978; Nidiffer, 2000; Rhatigan & Schuh, 1993; Schwartz, 2003). In most cases men were typically appointed to the dean of students position and the former deans of women were relegated to less desirable administrative roles (Nidiffer, 2000; Schwartz, 2010; Tuttle, 1996). Nonetheless, the transition to having a single dean position furthered the development of a field focused on working with college students. This field became known as student affairs.

The rise of student affairs. The dean of students position was designed to oversee all areas of the student experience, focusing primarily on aspects outside of the classroom (Appleton et al., 1978; Rhatigan & Schuh, 1993). The functional areas under the dean's purview typically included services such as campus dining, housing and residence life, counseling and health services, student activities, and student conduct (Dinniman, 1977). The dean appointed several key administrators to assist in the operation and oversight of such services (Appleton et al., 1978; Rhatigan & Schuh, 1993). The organization of such comprehensive services under the direction of one overarching administrator was influenced by the student personnel movement that rose to prominence at the early half of the 20th century at many colleges and universities across the country (Biddix & Schwartz, 2012; Cowley, 1940). The student personnel approach focused on a student's personal characteristics and attributes for academic and vocational

guidance (Biddix & Schwartz, 2012; Schwartz, 2010). The goal was to provide comprehensive support while students were in school and also help them plan for their future career after graduation.

The student personnel movement evolved over time into what is now commonly regarded as the field of student affairs (Biddix & Schwartz, 2012; Schwartz, 2010). Student affairs is the division of higher education that cultivates and promotes opportunities to increase student learning and the holistic development of college students (American College Personnel Association (ACPA) & National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA), 2010). Holistic development speaks to the whole student and incorporates the interconnectedness of both scholastic and personal growth. A holistic framework encompasses cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal developmental dimensions (Baxter Magolda & Taylor, 2017; Kegan, 1982, 1994). The field of student affairs grew as both an approach to working with college students and a functional area within the institutional administration along with eventually being designated as a specific academic discipline with graduate training programs. Common student affairs leadership titles created over the last half of the 20th century include senior student affairs officer and the vice president of student affairs. Individuals in these positions, which are frequently held in conjunction with the dean of students title at smaller institutions, are generally charged with oversight of assessment, budgetary, and professional staff supervisory responsibilities (Bass, 2006; Flanagan, 2006; Rhatigan & Schuh, 1993; Westfall, 2006). This is in addition to the typical responsibilities of the dean of students being responsible for the oversight and implementation of services for

the undergraduate college student experience on campus (Appleton et al., 1978; Dinniman, 1977; Rhatigan & Schuh, 1993, Tederman, 1997). The title used to describe the individual whose primary responsibility is oversight of student affairs on the campus but that has evolved through the years. Throughout all of the changes in the student population and the administrative structure over the past two centuries, the title of dean in some form or another has remained constant to identify the senior administrator responsible for the student experience both in and outside of the classroom and the associated support services.

The dean and student dynamic. Student affairs scholars concur that individuals in the dean of students position are instrumental in the development of college students (Appleton et al., 1978; Nidiffer, 2000; Rhatigan & Schuh, 1993; Schwartz, 2010). These professionals have taken both proactive and reactive approaches to working with the students they serve (Bickel & Lake, 1999; Nidiffer, 2000; Schwartz, 2010; Tederman, 1997). Since the earliest dean position was established, the underlying focus of the role was to address student concerns and needs along with supporting their academic and personal growth (Biddix & Schwartz, 2012; Dinniman, 1977, Nidiffer, 2000; Schwartz, 2010; Tederman, 1997). Deans would often address acts of misconduct and guide students to return to the path of being a positive member of the campus community. The earliest deans engaged with students to solve their problems and ensure they were able to continue their studies (Nidiffer, 2000; Schwartz, 2010). Common issues deans provided guidance for include family matters, financial struggles, pregnancy, and even substance abuse. Student persistence and retention is a unifying point of emphasis in current

strategic plans at colleges and universities across the United States (Hagedorn, 2012; Kuh, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 1991; Tinto, 2005). Although the approach to retaining students was less calculated in the past than in current times, the deans have continuously played a pivotal role in supporting student success to advance the mission and goals of the institution (Appleton et al., 1978; Nidiffer, 2000; Rhatigan & Schuh, 1993; Schwartz, 2010). One crucial factor for any dean's success is their ability to effectively develop rapport with students.

The dean of students position evolved significantly since its inception in the late 1800s (Nidiffer, 2000; Schwartz, 2010). LeBaron Russell Briggs is regarded as the first dean "for students" and was appointed from the faculty ranks at Harvard College in 1891 (Fley, 1979, p. 24). Briggs was selected to serve as dean because of his natural ease with students and his compassionate approach (Schwartz, 2010). He spent a majority of his time counseling students who struggled with facets of life while living away from their families. Briggs would assist students who were experiencing homesickness by connecting them with other students or community organizations (Schwartz, 2010). These experiences from the late 1800s parallel the challenges that students still face in the 21st century. The potential for a positive connection to be shared between a dean and a student is largely based on the approach of the former.

The deans of women were the first official wave of administrators appointed to serve the needs of a specific subset of the population (Nidiffer, 2000). These women worked to foster a hospitable environment for female students who were generally treated as second-class in comparison to their male peers. In order to be a trusted advocate for

female students, the early deans of women needed a well-balanced temperament with key social skills and a caring disposition (Nidiffer, 2000). A well-balanced temperament is a type of personality that was vastly different from the sanctimonious demeanor of previous female educators in the normal school setting (Nidiffer, 2000; Schwartz, 1997). Some of the most noteworthy deans of women were easily adaptable, capable of being stern and serious to please parents and presidents, yet kind and humorous to engage students (Nidiffer, 2000).

The deans of women viewed their profession as both an art and a science, incorporating a collection of experiences such as graduate training programs and professional associations to advance the vocation (Nidiffer, 2000). Many deans of women sought to develop personal relationships with female students in order to learn what affected their experiences both inside and outside of the classroom. Registration cards were used to keep records of interactions with students and to note specific concerns so they could follow up on these topics in future conversations (Nidiffer, 2000). The deans of women were cognizant that in order to best advocate for their students they needed to be well-acquainted with those they served.

The dean of men position was established to emulate the success of the dean of women towards the male student population. Although deans of men also realized that maintaining personal connections with students was essential in order to adequately address their complex needs, they had a different overall philosophy towards the profession. Some of the most outspoken deans of men held a misogynistic view that a capable dean was born and no training or education could take the place of innate

masculine qualities (Schwartz, 2010). They considered the “deanship as a calling” (Schwartz, 2003, p. 219). Many deans of men viewed their work as an art, believing that intuition and charisma were the ideal tools to reach and connect with students (Cowley, 1940; Schwartz, 1997, 2010).

Many deans of men took on a benevolent, older brother-type approach to working with male students (Schwartz, 2010). The advice and personal guidance they provided was based upon their own lived experiences. Others embraced the philosophy of *in loco parentis*, acting in the absence of parents as an absentee father (Bickel & Lake, 1999; Schwartz, 2010). Regardless of the specific nuances of their approach, the deans of men flourished with face-to-face interactions, often spending their whole day meeting with individual students and solving problems, particularly if they related to civility or financing their education (Schwartz, 2010). The attention to individual needs and the symbolic power of forging a personal connection was the hallmark of their approach to engage with other students. The ability to win students’ loyalty and admiration allowed them to facilitate meaningful relationships with students. This approach carried over to the dean of students position, as many of the latter deans of men were directly appointed to these positions as opposed to the deans of women (Nidiffer, 2000; Schwartz, 2010).

As enrollments quickly expanded in the mid 20th century the role of the dean changed as well. The dean’s responsibilities diversified as did the number of staff hired to address specific functional areas of the student experience (Nidiffer, 2000; Schwartz, 2010). At many large universities deans still worked directly with students at times, but less frequently than in years past (Schwartz, 2001, 2003). The student-friendly dean who

created a personal connection and commitment that many students felt and acknowledged was no longer present at many institutions. The human touch of deans was replaced with an emphasis on student engagement and connection to the campus and the institution (Schwartz, 2010). At large universities with thousands of students it is nearly impossible for most deans to develop personal connections with students as the earliest deans were able to do. In many ways, the size of the institution influenced the type of relationship that deans were able to develop with students (Schwartz, 2010). The legacy of commitment, compassion, care, and most importantly close connection to students lived on with deans of students at small colleges.

The liberal arts college. A liberal arts education focuses on enlightening undergraduate students through the study of a liberal arts curriculum based on a sampling of courses in the humanities, sciences, and social sciences (Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U), 2016). The liberal arts college is a small, primarily residential institution with a liberal arts curriculum and close interaction amongst faculty, staff, and students (AAC&U, 2016). As of 2015, the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education no longer designates a specific category for this type of institution (Carnegie Classification, 2015). Liberal arts colleges are generally classified as having small classes, close relationships between students and faculty and staff, a strong sense of community, residential living, full-time students in the age range of 18 to 24 with a total population of less than 2,500 students, and a curriculum less focused on vocational preparation (Baker & Baldwin, 2014; Baker, Baldwin, & Makker, 2012; Breneman, 1990).

Educational economist Breneman (1990) proposed that despite the fact that in 1987 Carnegie classified 540 liberal arts schools, only 212 institutions met the true qualifications to hold the distinction. Baker and Baldwin (2014) conducted an assessment based on the original metrics used by Breneman (1990) to calculate the actual number of liberal arts colleges in the United States. Baker and Baldwin's (2014) findings contended that there are 130 institutions that meet the criteria of a true liberal arts college. That number decreased significantly since Breneman's (1990) original study. Baker and Baldwin (2014), Baker et al. (2012), and Breneman (1990) all concurred that the reduction in liberal arts colleges is based on a combination of economic and organizational factors. Despite the decline in numbers over the past several decades, the researchers believed there is still a significant demand for this type of educational experience in the United States (Baker & Baldwin, 2014; Baker et al., 2012; Breneman, 1990). Liberal arts colleges add to the rich institutional diversity of the United States educational system (Breneman, 1994). Even though these colleges account for a small share of all postsecondary institutions and college students in the country, it should not be overlooked that they educate thousands of students each year (Hirt, 2006). Many students are attracted to the focus on holistic development and the strong sense of community that is the hallmark of the liberal arts college experience (Astin, 1999; Hirt et al., 2004; Hu & Kuh, 2002; Humphreys, 2006; Lang, 1999; Pascarella et al., 2004, Tederman, 1997).

Astin (1999), Hu and Kuh (2002), and Pascarella et al. (2004) uncovered the unique qualities of the liberal arts college and the distinct experiences that support

student development as compared to experiences at research universities and larger comprehensive colleges. Hirt et al. (2004) posited that student affairs work at small, private, liberal arts colleges is student-centered (as opposed to administrative-centered), practical (as opposed to theoretical), and service-oriented (rather than business-oriented), along with being more proactive as compared to the approach at larger universities. The student-centered nature is grounded in the existence of close relationships amongst students and the administration at small colleges (Hirt et al., 2004). Astin (1999) highlighted the significance of positive relationships and a strong sense of trust between students and administrators often prominent at liberal arts colleges. The prevalence of administrators' connection to students can influence such factors as higher graduation, persistence, and retention rates (Hagedorn, 2012; Kuh et al., 1991; Tinto, 2005). These positive measures are beneficial to both the institution's mission and overall student success. The prominence of student affairs administrators' direct engagement with students at liberal arts colleges is evocative of the approach and experiences of deans of men and women that once occurred decades earlier. Students' access to deans of students at liberal arts colleges is an experience that calls to be further understood. Hirt et al. (2004) recommended that future research was needed to examine the nature of relationships at these institutions. It appears that very little, if any progress was made since that proclamation to conduct research in order to better understand these experiences. It is essential to further explore the connections that deans of students share with undergraduate students at small, private, liberal arts colleges to improve the preparation of aspiring deans, to illuminate the beneficial role they play in the lives of

students, and to inform institutional leaders of the potential these roles can serve at these institutions.

Significance of the Study

There is a gap in the research that examines the nature of connections between deans of students and undergraduate students at small, private, liberal arts colleges (Bouchard, 2014; Hirt et al., 2004; Tederman, 1997). Much of the narrative on this topic is anecdotal, which therefore justifies the need for foundational empirical research to be conducted in this area. Moreover, Hirt et al. (2004) noted an imbalance of data on student affairs administrators with much of the data collected excluding those professionals at small colleges. Baker and Baldwin (2014) proposed there are approximately 130 liberal arts colleges in the United States. It is crucial for both higher education scholars and practitioners to have a more sophisticated understanding of the unique experiences shared between deans and the students they serve at this specific type of campus environment. The knowledge generated from such inquiry could impact thousands of college students and a substantial number of prospective deans that will take up residence at small, private, liberal arts colleges in years to follow.

Hirt, et al. (2004) uncovered a general assumption in the student affairs field regarding the similar nature of the work of professionals, regardless of the institutional type. Hirt et al. (2004) contended that this is an inaccurate assumption and exposed the differences in the nature of work by the size of the institution. Furthermore, a vast majority of student affairs graduate programs are found at large research universities (Hirt et al., 2004). New professionals to the field are socialized and groomed to aspects

of the research university culture which is often times vastly different from the small college environment in which they may seek employment (Hirt et al., 2004). As previously highlighted in this chapter, student affairs work at small, private liberal arts colleges is student-centered (as opposed to administrative-centered), practical (as opposed to theoretical), and service-oriented (rather than business-oriented), along with being more proactive (Hirt et al., 2004). The student-centered nature is directly related to the prevalence of close relationships amongst students and the administration at small colleges (Astin, 1999; Hirt et al., 2004). A more focused examination of the connections deans of students foster with students and the benefits at small colleges is required.

Previous research on this subset of the United States higher education system has not adequately addressed the experiences of deans of students at small, private, liberal arts colleges. Two doctoral dissertations produced within the past two decades focused on the dean of students profession (Bouchard, 2014; English, 2003). Bouchard (2014) examined the leadership style of deans at liberal arts colleges, but did not specifically focus on the nature of connections to students. English (2003) produced a narrative portrait of a dean of students over the course of an academic year, but this study was situated at a large, flagship research institution and dealt with the broad nature of the work of the participant dean. Although these studies made worthy contributions to the body of literature on deans of students, they did not speak specifically to my compelling area of interest, the meaningful and sustained connections between deans of students and undergraduate students at small, private, liberal arts colleges. There is a clear need for further exploration of the experiences of current deans of students at small, private,

liberal arts colleges to develop the body of literature and improve practice. The following section provides an explanation of my compelling interest to understand how and under what context does a dean of students develop meaningful and sustained connections with undergraduate students at a small, private, liberal arts college.

A Sojourn to Positionality

The social construction of knowledge centers around the uniqueness of shared experiences and the multiplicity of perspectives (Patton, 2015). Constructivist researchers recognize the fact that their own lived experiences influence the generation of subsequent knowledge (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). My irreplaceable frame of reference was significant to this study. I identify as a White, married, heterosexual male from a middle-class background. I aspire to serve as a dean of students at a small, private, liberal arts college. My ambition is undoubtedly tied to the influential experience of my undergraduate tenure at an institution that fits that same profile. It is of equal importance to understand the close and deeply meaningful relationship that I shared with my dean of students. That dynamic permeates the way I approached and positioned myself in this study. I also identified as an insider in relation to certain aspects of the participants I chose to study (Leigh, 2013). Although I do not hold the title of dean of students, I am currently employed in the profession, which exposes me to the professional duties and responsibilities of my participants. My unique positionality was important to not only the methodological aspects of this study, but also my entire approach and desire to explore this topic.

The reason I chose to study this subject was due to my insatiable thirst to intrinsically understand how and why deans of students are able to form such meaningful connections with undergraduate students, specifically in the liberal arts college setting. I took this inquiry seriously because I truly wanted to illuminate a clearer understanding of these experiences to demonstrate how impactful they can be to both the student and dean, and the institution. I was personally invested in and emotionally tied to this exploration. Initial site visits during my pilot study proved to be cathartic experiences. Those experiences continued as the study expanded, and the subsequent researcher memo reflections were like a journey back home. I uncovered knowledge that will contribute to the development and success of both future deans and their students. The nature of this study was deeply personal to me and resonated to the core of my identity. My positionality as the researcher in this study will be revisited in chapter three.

Definition of Key Terminology

The following section provides definitions for key terminology used in this research study. The explanations incorporate aspects of both original descriptions that I articulated along with formalized definitions from the scholarly literature. These definitions provide the reader with subject context and a clearer understanding of essential features of my study.

Dean of students. A dean of students is a senior-level administrator in the student affairs division of the United States higher education system directly responsible for the oversight and implementation of services for the overarching undergraduate college student experience on campus (Appleton et al., 1978; Dinniman, 1977; Rhatigan

& Schuh, 1993, Tederman, 1997). The origin of the dean of students position can be traced back to the evolutionary track of both the dean of women's and dean of men's roles (Nidiffer, 2000; Schwartz 2010). The dean generally works closely with faculty, administration, and the student body to serve the needs of the campus community. The dean of students has oversight of the holistic development of the students both inside and outside of the classroom. This oversight differs at various institutions but typically includes involvement with leadership programs, residence life, student conduct matters, amongst many other additional community initiatives.

Dean of men. A dean of men was an administrative position filled by a male staff member which was commonly established on college campuses in the early 20th century (Nidiffer, 2000; Schwartz 2010). This position was created in response to the success of dean of women position that rose to prominence several years earlier (Nidiffer, 2000; Schwartz 2010). The dean of men was responsible for the academic, personal, and social needs of male students. Many deans of men approached their work as a "calling" fit only for men with the appropriate personality characteristics (Cowley, 1940; Schwartz 2010). This position eventually evolved into what became the dean of students role in the middle of the 20th century.

Dean of women. A dean of women was an administrative position filled by a female staff member which was commonly established on college campuses in the late 19th century (Nidiffer, 2000; Schwartz 2010). The dean of women was responsible for the academic, personal, and social needs of female students. The deans of women favored graduate training programs, professional organizations, and scholarly

publications to advance their work and the overall profession (Gerda, 2006; Nidiffer, 2000; Schwartz 1997). The position reached its prominence in the early parts of the 19th century, and eventually disappeared at most institutions towards the half of the century.

Meaningful and sustained connections. A relationship between two people that has an important or useful purpose that continues for an extended period of time is the definition used to describe meaningful and sustained connections in this study. Because I believe they are similar, I am associating the connections that develop between a dean and a student with the concept of mentoring. Roberts (2000) defined mentoring as, “a formalized process whereby a more knowledgeable and experienced person actuates a supportive role of overseeing and encouraging reflection and learning within a less experienced and knowledgeable person, so as to facilitate that persons’ career and personal development” (p. 162).

Senior student affairs officer and vice president of student affairs. These common titles were adopted over the past several decades on many college campuses to identify senior-leadership in the student affairs division. Individuals in these positions, which are frequently held in conjunction with the dean of students title at smaller institutions, are generally charged with oversight of assessment, budgets, crisis-management, professional staff supervision, consultation with the president and the president’s cabinet, and the overall umbrella of student affairs and student development responsibilities (Bass, 2006; Flanagan, 2006; Rhatigan & Schuh, 1993; Westfall, 2006).

Small, private, liberal arts college. One of these institutions is a small, primarily residential institution with a liberal arts curriculum and close interaction

amongst faculty, staff, and students (AAC&U, 2016). Key attributes of these institutions are: small classes, close relationships, a strong sense of community, residential living, full-time students in the age range of 18 to 24 with a total population of less than 2,500 students, and a curriculum less focused on vocational preparation and more on the holistic development of students as engaged and well-rounded citizens (Baker et al., 2012; Breneman, 1990).

Student affairs. The division of higher education programs and services that cultivates and promotes opportunities to increase student learning and the holistic development of college students (ACPA & NASPA, 2010). Common functional areas of student affairs include: housing and residence life, leadership programs, new student orientation, student activities and involvement, and student conduct amongst many others. At some institutions these can include health services, career services, and athletics.

Student personnel movement. An approach to working with college students initiated by Walter Dill Scott, president of Northwestern University, in the early 20th century. Scott's approach was based on personnel psychology used in the military, which identified a student's personnel characteristics and attributes for academic and vocational guidance (Biddix & Schwartz, 2012; Schwartz, 2010). The student personnel movement is regarded as the precursor to the modern field of student affairs (Biddix & Schwartz, 2012; Schwartz, 2010).

Undergraduate students. College students enrolled in bachelors-level courses at a college or university.

Summary

Deans of students are influential professionals in the field of higher education and student affairs who are responsible for the oversight of the undergraduate college student experience (Appleton et al., 1978; Dinniman, 1977; Rhatigan & Schuh, 1993, Tederman, 1997). There have been various iterations of the profession, as the deanship evolved over most of the 20th century and into current times (Nidiffer, 2000; Schwartz, 2010). The central focus of this study relates to the nature of the meaningful connections shared between the dean and students. More specifically, this study examined the unique environment of the small, private, liberal arts college and how that setting influenced the experiences of the dean of students in relation to developing those respective connections. In an effort to better understand the context and process of the development of such meaningful connections, this study joined participants on a reflective journey of their experiences serving as a dean of students. This study will continue in the following chapter with a comprehensive review of literature related to the dean of students profession, liberal arts colleges, and the factors related to developing connections with students.

Chapter Two

The dean of students position has proven to be a highly reactionary profession throughout modern history. This is evident given the position's consistent evolution since its inception in the late 1800s in the United States higher education system (Appleton, Briggs, & Rhatigan, 1978; Dinniman, 1977; Nidiffer, 2000; Rhatigan & Schuh, 1993; Schwartz, 2010). Many of the functional adaptations were in direct response to the ever-evolving college student population. Too, the dean of students position serves as a barometer for social change in relation to the student population on the American college campus. The individuals holding the dean position are instrumental in the development of college students outside of the classroom at institutions of higher learning (Appleton, et al., 1978; Nidiffer, 2000; Rhatigan & Schuh, 1993; Schwartz, 2010).

The deans traditionally served as the intermediary between the student body and the senior administration and leadership of the institution. Moreover, deans were required to reactively deal with student conduct concerns and proactively establish new institutional policies to promote positive and healthy student behavior (Bickel & Lake, 1999; Nidiffer, 2000; Schwartz, 2010; Tederman, 1997). The dean of students position evolved to meet the demands of the administrative leadership, campus population, and the mission of the institution. The various iterations of the dean position over the decades

have each used numerous approaches to establish relationships with their students to be an agent of change. The deans played a pivotal role in response to the shifting demographics of the student population in the country (Nidiffer, 2000; Schwartz, 2010). The most effective deans made an intentional effort to directly connect with their students to better understand their complex needs to serve as the best possible advocate (Nidiffer, 2000; Schwartz, 2010).

Small, private, liberal arts colleges are primarily residential institutions with modest enrollments and a majority of their population being full-time, traditional aged college students (Baker & Baldwin, 2014; Baker et al., 2012; Breneman, 1990). Astin (1999), Hersh (1999), Hu and Kuh (2002), and Pascarella et al. (2004) noted the valuable attributes of the liberal arts colleges and the distinct benefits they offer students. The intimate environment found at these institutions seeks to foster the development of beneficial relationships between students and administrators (Astin, 1999). Bouchard (2014), Hirt, et al. (2004), and Tederman (1997) highlighted the lack of scholarly research focused specifically on administrators at small, private, liberal arts colleges. There is a void in the literature that requires additional exploration of the experiences of deans of students and their interactions with undergraduate students at small, private, liberal arts colleges.

Historical Overview of the Dean of Students Position

The following section provides historical insight into the nature of the dean of students position as it evolved over time in the United States higher education system. The lexical origin of the dean title is explored to establish a deeper understanding of the

impetus for the creation of the position. The key evolutionary adaptations of the role are explored in addition to the factors that influenced the overall development of the profession.

Terminology. Since the late 19th century, the title of dean has been applied in various ways to a senior-level administrator directly responsible for the oversight of student experiences outside of the classroom. Dinniman (1977) noted that the term dean has prior roots in military, civil service, and ecclesiastical domains, which predate the application in the higher education setting. The term originates from the Latin word *decanus* which means, “one person set over ten persons” (Dinniman, 1977, p. 4). The Latin root of the word symbolizes order and influence. Military officers and church officials carried this title to signify their leadership authority. Dinniman concluded that the use of this term in the higher education sector is due to the scholastic influence and involvement of the clergy in Europe throughout the Middle Ages.

As the deanship evolved to meet the demands of the growing student population in the United States, the specific title of the individual in this position varied by institution. When college presidents grew weary of dealing with students outside of the classroom setting and in a disciplinary sense, they appointed deans of women and deans of men to manage concerns directly related to those respective genders (Nidiffer, 2000; Schwartz, 2010). Over the passage of time, demographics continued to diversify and institutions eventually abandoned these gender-specific titles and created a more generalized dean of students position to work with all students in favor of the retired

binary roles (Appleton et al., 1978; Nidiffer, 2000; Rhatigan & Schuh, 1993; Schwartz, 2003).

The term student affairs relates to the division of higher education that cultivates and promotes opportunities to increase student learning and the holistic development of college students (ACPA & NASPA, 2010). Common student affairs titles adopted recently over the past several decades on many college campuses include senior student affairs officer and the vice president of student affairs. Individuals in these positions, which are frequently held in conjunction with the dean of students title at smaller institutions, are generally charged with greater oversight of assessment, budgetary, and professional staff supervisory responsibilities (Bass, 2006; Flanagan, 2006; Rhatigan & Schuh, 1993; Westfall, 2006). The terminology used to describe the individual accountable for students has evolved throughout the years. Despite all of the changes in student demographics and organizational structure over the past century, the title of dean in some form or another has remained to identify the senior administrator responsible for the experiences of college students outside of the classroom.

Historical Evolution. At Medieval universities, a faculty member was appointed dean for a specific term to supervise both faculty and students. Part of this responsibility included management of discipline in student living quarters. The earliest deans are linked to the care of both academic instruction and outside of the classroom aspects of student life (Dinniman, 1977). The practices of early American colleges and universities were deeply influenced by the elder European institutions (Dinniman, 1977; Nidiffer, 2000; Schwartz, 2010; Thelin, 2011). The tradition of appointing a dean from the faculty

to oversee these two areas in evolving American institutions is based on this European model.

A certain level of controversy and uncertainty exists among historians over when the term dean first appeared at American institutions. Cowley (1940) and Dinniman (1977) suggested that academic faculty were appointed to deanship roles at American colonial colleges as early as the late 1700s. Although this timeline for the initial appearance of the title dean in American education is reputable, other scholars recognize that the position with fundamental responsibilities most closely aligned with direct student involvement likely emerged in the late 19th century (Nidiffer, 2000; Schwartz, 2010).

In order to frame the historical accounts of the evolution of the dean of students position, I created original titles for each respective iteration of the profession. I feel these titles not only describe, but also exemplify the role and style of each model of the dean throughout the passage of time. I created these titles based on a synthesis of the historical literature available on the deans of students. The titles I developed are represented as: the trailblazer, the pioneering women, the copyists, the scientists, the masculine revivalists, and the modernists.

The trailblazer. In the 18th and 19th centuries many American institutions educated a small number of students in comparison to later iterations. As enrollments grew following the American Civil War, presidents and academic faculty members were no longer in favor of engaging with students and their affairs outside of the classroom setting. This hands-off approach was inspired by the German education system's

principle of impersonalism, in which non-academic issues were not the concern of the instructional faculty (Cowley, 1940; Dinniman, 1977; Gerda, 2006). College presidents knew it would not be so simple to just turn a blind eye, but nonetheless they were not equipped to deal with student concerns. In 1891, Charles Eliot, president of Harvard College, made the landmark decision to appoint English professor, LeBaron Russell Briggs, Dean of Harvard College (Dinniman, 1977; Nidiffer, 2000; Schwartz, 2010). Briggs, thought of as the first dean “for students,” “became the first officer in the history of American higher education charged with responsibility for student relations as separate and distinct from instruction” (Fley, 1979, p. 24). The appointment of Briggs heralded the early foundation of the student affairs movement and a new era in higher education.

Schwartz (2010) illustrated that Briggs was chosen for the role of dean due to his natural ease with students and his overall compassionate nature. He had already established relationships with a majority of the students since they were required to complete Freshmen Composition under his direction. Briggs focused much of his attention on providing counsel to the young men of Harvard who were dealing with the difficulties of living away from their families for the first time. The appointment of Briggs illuminated the humanistic approach of early student affairs work (Cowley, 1940). Briggs was placed in this role because of his warm personality and helpful disposition coupled with the growing needs of the student body, along with the attendance of less wealthy students (Schwartz, 2010). The demands and controversies of the ever-changing demographics would draw attention to a new group of students at other institutions across the nation.

The pioneering women. In 1892, just one year after the appointment of Briggs, Alice Freeman Palmer and Marion Talbot rose to prominence at William Rainey Harper's University of Chicago. Harper sensed that the growing enrollments of female students and their even more complicated needs required the specialized and coordinated expertise of female faculty members (Gerda, 2006; Nidiffer, 2000; Schwartz 1997). Coeducation was now increasingly common following the Civil War and many institutions, especially those publically funded, depended on the tuition dollars of female students in order to stay financially sound given their high operating costs (Gerda, 2006; Nidiffer, 2000; Schwartz 1997). Palmer and Talbot, along with many other women who followed suit in the early 20th century answered the call and carved a new path during the infancy of the student affairs movement. These deans of women paved the way for female administrators and female student advocacy for years to follow.

Prior to the appointment of the first deans of women, females affiliated with education in normal school settings were typically thought of as matrons who were quick to interfere in the matters of female students (Nidiffer, 2000; Schwartz 1997). The early deans of women worked to combat those negative stereotypes and focused their attention to fight for the equal treatment of female students so they would have the same academic, social, and professional opportunities as men (Gerda, 2006; Nidiffer, 2000; Schwartz 1997). Women were often thought of as unfit for the same type of education as their male counterparts. The deans' advocacy for the equitable treatment of female students coincided with their own fight to become recognized as valued administrators in the collegiate setting. These women took intentional steps to establish graduate training

programs, professional organizations, and scholarly publications to advance their work and the overall profession (Gerda, 2006; Nidiffer, 2000; Schwartz 1997). The first deans of women are credited with fostering welcoming environments and playing a pivotal role in the success of female students at the turn of the century (Gerda, 2006; Nidiffer, 2000; Schwartz 1997; Tuttle 1996). These women would forever change the face of higher education and provide opportunities for other student affairs professionals to follow.

The copyists. As a direct result of the early success of the deans of women, a new niche was formed for male administrators to ride the coattails of Palmer, Talbot, and company. The dean of men position was formed to emulate the role of deans of women, but for male students. These male administrators also rose from the faculty ranks and helped provide direction and counsel to young college men. Ironically, the way deans of men went about their business was in most cases drastically different from their female counterparts. Schwartz (2003) compared how the deans of men viewed “the deanship as a calling, as a minster or priest might be called to the pulpit” (p. 219). This unique approach is analogous to the ecclesiastical roots of the dean from the Middle Ages (Dinniman, 1977).

The deans of men initially avoided the pursuit of specialized graduate training, research, and publication in favor of the notion of an ideal dean being born, not made (Schwartz 1997). The first deans of men felt that intuition and charisma were their best tools to reach and inspire their students. The thought of structured means of preparation strayed from their personal approach and inborn talents. The deans of men viewed the

practices of deans of women as overly mechanical. Rather, they favored their calling as an art (Cowley, 1940; Schwartz, 2010).

Although somewhat present in the work of deans of women, the founding deans of men such as Thomas Arkle Clark and Scott Goodnight, embraced the philosophy of *in loco parentis*, meaning, in the absence of parents. The first deans of men were placed in the parental role simultaneously acting as a disciplinarian and absentee father (Bickel & Lake, 1999; Schwartz, 2010). Early on, this style was generally attributed to the approach towards male students, as their behavior was more likely to stray from the accepted norms of conservative society as compared to female students (Nidiffer, 2000; Schwartz, 1997, 2003, 2010). The gender difference among the students would eventually blur as both female and male students embraced the ever-growing progressive counterculture commonly referred to as the youth generation that was born in post-World War I society (Schwartz, 2010). Just as the aftermath of the Civil War brought with it changes to higher education such as the evolving student demographic, so would the conclusion of first World War. Advances from the military would influence the work of the dean at this point and then once again in the mid-20th century.

The scientists. Walter Dill Scott was a prominent industrial psychologist and eventually became president at Northwestern University. Scott is regarded as the leader of the personnel movement, whose advances in the field of personnel psychology influenced the approach to working with students on college campuses (Biddix & Schwartz, 2012). Scott's new method of working with college students was adapted from a battery of tests used for military officer selection during World War I. On college

campuses this approach was renamed the student personnel movement, which identified a student's personnel characteristics and attributes for academic and vocational guidance (Biddix & Schwartz, 2012; Schwartz, 2010).

Scott eliminated the dean of men and dean of women positions at Northwestern in favor a group approach. He appointed the Board of Personnel Administration, which oversaw counseling, housing, financial aid, admissions, and student records (Biddix & Schwartz, 2012). Scott's personnel movement attracted much attention and was adopted on many other campuses (Biddix & Schwartz, 2012; Nidiffer, 2000; Schwartz, 2010). This personnel mentality was less foreign for those working at small private schools, because out of necessity most individuals employed at these institutions were commonly required to address all of these functional areas due to generally smaller administrative staffs (Biddix & Schwartz, 2012). Schwartz (2010) revealed that in most cases these individuals were responsible for a variety of roles and were involved in more professional but close relationships with students due to both the reduced student and administrative populations. Many traditional deans of men at larger public schools resisted this movement and considered it a direct threat to their approach of working with students and even more importantly, their profession (Schwartz, 2003, 2010). The personnel movement was less controversial with deans of women, as it aligned with their value of graduate training and career counseling (Nidiffer, 2000).

The student personnel movement led to the growing popularity of vocational guidance services (Biddix & Schwartz, 2012). At the same time students were more commonly going to college to prepare for a career as opposed to becoming a better

citizen as was typically the case in the pre-WWII era (Biddix & Schwartz, 2012; Schwartz, 2010; Thelin, 2011). The focus of the student personnel movement was on the goals and aspirations of students with an emphasis on service of the student as an individual. Francis Bradshaw, dean of men at University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, was adamantly opposed to the traditional view that deans of men were naturally born for the role (Schwartz, 2010). Bradshaw was one of the most notable deans of men to support the student personnel movement, believing that deans of men would benefit from specific preparation. As the personnel movement became more prevalent, its adopters viewed it as the “transition of the deans of men from reactive agents of the university to proactive and engaged agents of change” (Schwartz, 2010, p. 110). The division between the deans and personnel workers was described as “working towards similar objectives with dissimilar methods” (Schwartz, 2010, p. 112). The student personnel movement created a lasting influence, but once again, war would have a profound impact on the deanship.

The masculine revivalists. After the end of World War II an influx of military veterans flooded American colleges and universities due to the generous education benefits of The Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944, commonly known as the GI Bill (Rhatigan & Schuh, 1993; Thelin, 2011). As unprecedented student enrollments continued to swell, institutions struggled at times to meet the needs of this intense wave of male students. The expansion of student veterans led to the perceived demand for stronger male authority figures on college campuses (Schwartz, 2010). As both deans of men and women were evolving into more student personnel-type roles there was an effort

to centralize services under the supervision of one individual. The consolidation, known as reorganization, gave rise to the dean of students position, which placed one person with authority over all student personnel and services (Schwartz, 2003, 2010).

Women were seen as unfit for this task and either lost their positions or they were forced to take on less responsibility in favor of the incumbent dean of men (Nidiffer, 2000; Schwartz, 2010). Nidiffer (2000) argued that this restructuring marked the extinction of the dean of women position. The transition to the dean of students signified the return of the male-dominated academy with gender bias overshadowing the remarkable accomplishments of the deans of women (Schwartz, 2010). In certain cases, most notably at small, private, liberal arts colleges where tradition was key, the dean of men and women positions persisted into the 1960s and 1970s (Schwartz, 2010). The latter half of the 20th century fostered the rise of the dean of students position as the senior student affairs officer in higher education. As history would repeat itself again, there would be more changes.

The modernists. As the cost and scrutiny over the value of a college education persisted, college presidents insisted on a higher level of accountability for all student affairs-related work (Bass, 2006; Bouchard, 2014; English, 2014; Flanagan 2006; Westfall, 2006). In response, the dean of students was often required to take on additional responsibilities to meet these demands. New titles such as the senior student affairs officer or more specifically the vice president of student affairs became prominent in the later 20th century and into the 21st century. These individuals report directly to the president and are responsible for the direct oversight of all student affairs services along

with the assessment, budgeting, long-term planning, and professional staff supervision of numerous programs and services (Bass, 2006; Flanagan, 2006).

At many small institutions the dean of students position evolved into or was held in conjunction with the vice president of student affairs title (Westfall, 2006). The later evolution of responsibilities demonstrates the increased complexity and challenges of the role along with the individual's critical involvement in the institutional decision-making process (Bass, 2006; Westfall, 2006). While scholars make a strong argument that gender inequality still exists in higher education administration today, women are often found in the senior student affairs officer and vice president of student affairs positions in the 21st century (Schwartz, 2010). A main concern with the senior student affairs officer and vice president of student affairs positions is that these individuals are often increasingly farther removed from daily personal interactions with college students (Bass, 2006). There is good reason to encourage a return to the roots of the dean's position for campus leadership to regain daily connections with college students to address their concerns.

A survey of research conducted on various aspects of the deanship provided valuable perspective for my unfolding research. Three doctoral dissertations provided historical context, produced a narrative portrait, and explored leadership style in relation to the dean of students. These three studies support the significance of deans being connected to their students and will be discussed in the following section.

Noteworthy Dissertations Examining Deans of Students

I examined three doctoral dissertations that explored the dean position to gain a deeper understanding of previous research conducted on this topic. All three of the research projects were qualitative studies, each with a different focus that related to the role of individuals holding the dean position on a college or university campus. Each researcher utilized a different approach, which provided valuable insight on the role of the dean in various capacities. The dissertations are presented in chronological order of their respective defense date.

Historical examination of deans of women. Katherine Tuttle (1996) produced a research study titled, *What Became of the Dean of Women? Changing Roles for Women Administrators in American Higher Education, 1940-1980*. Tuttle conducted a historical examination of five deans of women at various institutions from the mid to late 20th century. She utilized a case study approach to examine archival records and interviews. Tuttle painted a vivid picture regarding the experiences of the deans of women who lost their authority to men appointed to the dean of students position in the guise of administrative efficiency. Tuttle suggested multiple factors that led to the demise of the deans of women including such forces as gender relations, the student personnel movement, increasing student diversity, various forms of discrimination, the postwar expansion of higher education and student services, changes in students' legal status, and civil rights legislation (Tuttle, 1996). Many former deans of women assumed alternate roles on campus to continue their advocacy for the concerns of female students.

Tuttle used Moore's (1982) synthesis of organizational theory to distinguish between two forms of power in relation to the deans of women authority and influence. When the deans of women were stripped of their titles they also lost most of their authority, which is directly related to position. The deans of women were still able to maintain some of their influence, which is rooted in charisma, expertise, leadership skills, and knowledge of organizational networks and structures (Tuttle, 1996). However, to serve as an effective advocate, administrators must possess a certain level of political power within the institution.

Tuttle also applied Cowley's (1940) model for three types of individuals working with students in her dissertation. This framework categorizes early student affairs practitioners to one of three types: humanitarians, administrators, or psychologists. The humanitarians rose from the academic ranks and focused on the needs of the students in response to the depersonalization of the institution. The early deans of men and women best represent these advocates. The administrators placed an emphasis on business and management efficiency in the expanding institutions. The early deans of students and current senior student affairs officers fill this role. The psychologists had training in research and testing. These individuals are the student personnel and career counseling staff members. Cowley's (1940) three types of student affairs practitioners provide an alternate lens to view the downfall of the deans of women.

Tuttle (1996) argued one of the main reasons that deans of women lost titles in favor of male deans of students was the impact of the GI Bill and its influence on the administrative and human resource structure. Regardless of the influx of male student

veterans, the widespread dismissal of high-level female administrators was unjust. The mere discharge of these pivotal female professionals essentially discounted the key influence of women in the early development of the student affairs field. Tuttle (1996) highlighted two crucial outcomes of the demotion of dean of women. First, the loss of the title alone had a ramification on the perception of the individual in the eyes of students, faculty, staff, and parents. More importantly, the direct line to the president was a monumental loss as a result of this shift. Data from my pilot study reinforces the importance of the dean's access to the president as having a subsequent impact on their ability to best serve the student body. It would take considerable time before women would once again gain prominence in their field via position, access to the president, and title of dean of students or vice president (Tuttle, 1996). Tuttle ended her study with the unanswered question of whether a dean of women is needed once again on the college campus. Approximately 20 years has passed since the time of this dissertation, and her question certainly seems valid today. The recent explosion of Title IX and sexual misconduct cases (Jaschik, 2015) on college campuses warrants further consideration of a potential revival of the advocacy work of the dean of women.

Tuttle's (1996) study provided historical perspective not only on the rise of the deans of women position, but also their unfortunate demise. Her findings offered recommendations for female administrators moving into the 21st century. As a historical study, this research prompted me to learn about the past in order to understand the state of women in higher education towards the end of the 20th century in 1996. A limitation of this study is that it is now outdated in the sense that many female administrators

currently serve in the role of dean of students, and some even simultaneously hold the title of vice president of student affairs (Schwartz, 2010). An interesting advancement of her study would be an exploration of the current experiences of deans of women or other female senior student affairs officers in relation to the rise of and response to Title IX concerns.

Narrative portrait of a dean. Anthony English (2003) produced the research study titled, *Portrait of a Dean of Students: Dick McKaig at Indiana University, 2002-2003*. English took a unique approach in the form of a case study with heavy influences from both narrative analysis and ethnological research. The focus of English's study was Indiana University's dean of students, Dick McKaig. The research project provided a holistic profile of McKaig in his role as dean over the course of an entire academic year. English studied his participant closely, conducting countless interviews and observing daily work interactions with various constituents.

English (2003), sought to create a qualitative profile of a senior administrator to identify methods and approaches to improve campus operations (English, 2003). The case study design required him to first select a bounded context that satisfied his research question. English's purposeful selection justified the exclusive study of McKaig (Maxwell, 2013). English observed 64 separate instances of McKaig engaging with students, faculty, and staff in both private meetings and at public events. He recorded field notes to identify key evidence in these situations. English's study of McKaig delivered recommendations to both higher education training programs and those

individuals who aspire to hold the dean of students or other similar senior student affairs officer positions.

English (2003) suggested that students in graduate programs must engage in key learning experiences to better prepare for student affairs careers. He specifically noted the importance of two skills and three approaches to help facilitate such development. English highlighted the gravity of being flexible and further developing communication skills. An effective dean must be able to clearly communicate and adapt in any situation to work with a wide variety of constituents in order to maintain a positive campus environment. Recommended approaches were to examine organizational structures and institutional cultures, study successful professionals, and gain meaningful hands-on experience whenever possible.

The recommendations for the rising practitioner focused on an overall commitment to students. A large part of the pledge involves being informed of student life on campus and the concerns of the greater community. English also emphasized focusing on the positive in any situation and developing loyal, competent student affairs staff members. The overall emphasis of care and commitment to students helps illustrate a best practice of a successful dean of students. Many of English's recommendations, specifically as they relate to developing strong communication skills and establishing a connection to the student body, are supported by my pilot study.

English's (2003) narrative study painted an insightful in-depth portrait of a single administrator, Dick McKaig. Observing and writing about a single individual provided a fascinating but limited scope and made a comprehensive understanding towards other

deans difficult. I also question the authenticity of some of English's observations. I have no doubt that he wrote about what he actually observed. Rather, I question if his mere presence as a researcher following the dean for several months influenced the behavior of those around McKaig. Lastly, English studied a dean of students at a large, flagship, state research university. The setting of his study is vastly different from the small, private, liberal arts college environment that I explored.

Leadership exploration. Ryan Bouchard (2014) produced the research study titled, *An Exploration of Leadership: The Dean of Students through the Eyes of Student Leaders*. Bouchard conducted numerous interviews with undergraduate student leaders to explore the leadership approach of two deans at small, four-year liberal arts colleges. His grounded theory approach utilized Bolman and Deal's (2008) leadership theory and Birnbaum's (1988) collegial institution type to discover how deans nurtured successful outside of the classroom experiences for students. Bolman and Deal (2008) identified Four Frames of Leadership (human resource, political, structural, and symbolic) that individuals can adopt to become more effective in their organizations. Birnbaum's (1988) Collegial Model of Higher Education described an organizational atmosphere with close interpersonal connections, defined as being tightly coupled. Bouchard's research revealed that the two deans of students in his study positively impacted student leaders in four ways as detailed in the next two paragraphs.

The presence of a dean of students at campus functions resulted in students perceiving their deans as approachable, visible, and supportive (Bouchard, 2014). Outside-the-classroom student experiences have historically fallen under the purview of

the dean (Dinniman, 1977; Nidiffer, 2000; Schwartz, 2010). When deans are engaged with students during daily activities and special campus events, they are able to create and maintain connections to gain a deeper understanding of the community. Student learning is best facilitated when faculty, staff, and students have established relationships and frequently interact with one another (Kuh et al., 1991). The communal experience represents a key aspect of the collegial model (Birnbaum, 1988). The dean's focus of time and energy towards students demonstrates a clear investment in their overall development. The cultivation of relationships (human resource frame) and the significance of involvement in campus traditions (symbolic frame) reinforce the notion to students that the dean is approachable and supportive (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Participants from my pilot study clearly articulated the importance of the dean being approachable, visible, and supportive at campus events and with specific student organizations. They believed this type of connection had a positive impact on both individual students and the institution as a whole.

A noticeable level of care and support from the dean made the students feel respected and produced a level of perceived advocacy from the institution (Bouchard, 2014). Historically, one of the main responsibilities of the dean was serving as the primary advocate for the complex needs of students (Nidiffer, 2000; Schwartz, 2010). Ethic of care and justice represent the human resource and political frames of the deans (Bolman & Deal, 2008). The interpersonal communication skills of the dean were highly valued by students (Bouchard, 2014). Birnbaum (1998) stressed the importance of interpersonal exchange as a means to foster meaningful relationships as the hallmark of

the collegial model. Again, initial findings from my pilot study reinforce the value of frequent engagement with students as key to the dean of students' approach. Bouchard's last finding was that deans with effective problem solving skills enhanced the overall resolution of campus and student concerns. The final two findings fortify the emphasis that should be placed on using Bolman and Deal's (2008) human resource frame to focus on key skill development to maximize the effectiveness of the dean and enhance overall relations with students.

All of the findings of Bouchard's (2014) research reinforce the recommendations for aspiring practitioners found in English's (2003) study. The dean's ability to connect with students and understand their needs directly impacts their success as a professional in the eyes of the students they serve. The dean of students position is structurally designed to respond to and resolve the challenges of their respective community (Bolman & Deal, 2008; English, 2003). The integration of Bolman and Deal's (2008) organizational framework and Birnbaum's (1988) Collegial Institution Model serve as a guide for deans to improve the sense of campus community and resolution of challenges. The dean of students' personal approach and performance influences the overall quality of the student experience.

Bouchard's (2014) study is useful as his research setting is based at small, liberal arts colleges with a focus on deans of students. This was the only dissertation I was able to identify that was conducted with the same setting and focus as my study. A limitation is that this is described as a grounded theory, whereas my study is not. Too, Bouchard's inquiry was actually based on interactions with undergraduate students as his research

participants, not deans themselves. The students provided insight regarding their views of the dean as a leader. My study was designed in such a way as to interpret experiences and reflections through direct engagement with deans as my participants.

Weaving It All Together

After an examination of the historical evolution of the dean of students position and review of several insightful doctoral dissertations focused on deans, a much clearer picture of the profession exists. There are some unifying aspects of the dean of students position and consistent characteristics of the individuals who served in those roles over the years. All versions of the deans manifested to serve the needs of the ever-evolving student population. LeBaron Russell Briggs rose to prominence by assisting male students living away from their parents for the first time. Briggs filled a void when Harvard faculty members were less concerned with the lives of students outside of the classroom (Dinneman, 1977; Schwartz, 2010). Alice Freeman Palmer stood up and advocated for the equitable treatment of the growing wave of female students (Nidiffer, 2000). Scott Goodnight served as a paternal figure in the age of in loco parentis for rowdy students of the youth generation (Schwartz, 2010). Additional variations of the deans rose to fruition to address the current demand. The role and identity of the dean continually evolved to meet the needs of the given student population and institutional culture of the time (Appleton et al., 1978; Rhatigan & Schuh, 1993). There is sound reason to believe that the current legion of senior student affairs educators and vice presidents of student affairs will continue to evolve based on this fundamental principle (Flanagan, 2006). The deans have always been an adaptive collection of professionals.

Another consistent theme is the quality of care at the core of the dean's role. The early deans of men and women fought to improve the conditions for their respective students. These individuals petitioned to presidents and governing boards for improved housing conditions, financial aid, medical care, and extracurricular opportunities for students (Nidiffer, 2000; Schwartz, 2010). These issues are still directly handled by the dean, or at the very least under the greater purview of their responsibility profile. The focus on the health and development of the student outside of the classroom has always been a driving force of any dean. Nidiffer (2000) and Schwartz (2010) vividly portrayed the early deans of men and women as individuals who were deeply committed to the overall welfare of their students. The authors suggested that in most cases, many students recognized these valiant efforts and were quite fond and appreciative of their deans. The deans have consistently demonstrated a close connection with their students and support Birnbaum's (1988) Collegial Institution Model. The concept of care and concern for students was one of the most prominent subjects mentioned by the deans who participated in my pilot study.

Lastly, deans of students are often described as individuals with dynamic and often times extroverted personalities. Nidiffer (2000) and Schwartz (2010) extensively profiled a cast of early deans of men and women and often attributed charisma as a key characteristic that contributed to their overall success in the role. Even scholars who examined the modern deans noted that a dynamic personality is conducive to inspiring students and instilling confidence in colleagues (Appleton et al., 1978; Bass, 2006; Bouchard, 2014; English 2003; Flanagan, 2006; Kuh & Coomes, 1986; Rhatigan &

Schuh, 1993; Tederman, 1997; Westfall, 2006). The ability to effectively promote a shared institutional vision requires polished communication and public speaking skills. It is essential for the dean to be able to command a personal conversation with a student in distress or a bustling room filled with new students and their families. The dean's common depiction as a leader, hero, or heroine is akin to Bolman and Deal's (2008) symbolic frame. The deans interviewed in my pilot study explained that an outgoing approach and a charismatic persona aided in their work with students. A preliminary archetype of a dean of students could be described as an individual who is adaptive, charismatic, and committed to the students that he or she serves.

The analysis of the dean of students position produced a deeper understating of the historical influences that shaped the profession into its current status. Birnbaum's (1988) model portrays the type of environment that many deans hoped to create on their campuses. The story that I uncovered through examination of the historical literature painted the deans in a positive light. I did not find the deans to be the cruel and unreasonable tyrants as depicted in popular college movies like *Animal House* (Simmons, Reitman, & Landis, 1978) and *Old School* (Goldberg, Medjuck, Phillips, & Reitman, 2003). I discovered that the deans rose to prominence out of a need for student advocacy. The deans of men and women stepped into this role because they cared for students and wanted to help them develop and succeed. Aspiring deans must learn from their predecessors and not lose sight of how and why they were forced to evolve over time. Professional values and practices established by the earliest deans should guide the

current dean's work to align institutional missions with the importance of connection to students.

There is a need for the extensive study of the current deans of students on the modern college campus. My specific interest on the development of meaningful and sustained connections between deans and students compelled me to further explore the deans of students at small, private, liberal arts colleges. It appears that deans of students at smaller institutions are most likely to engage in frequent and possibly more meaningful interactions with students as compared to their counterparts at larger public institutions (Bass, 2006; Bouchard, 2014; Flanagan 2006; Westfall, 2006; Tederman, 1997). These relationships were once present at public institutions during the careers of the early deans of men and women such as Thomas Arkle Clark and Marion Talbot (Nidiffer, 2000; Schwartz, 2010). Some of the factors that permit such close interaction with students are a more intimate campus environment, smaller student enrollments, and the dean having diverse work responsibilities that require collaboration with students (Bass, 2006; Bouchard, 2014; Flanagan 2006; Westfall, 2006; Tederman, 1997).

All of these elements justify the reason why small, private, liberal arts colleges attract many of their students. These institutions focus on developing the individual student by way of personal attention in both the classroom and through co-curricular activities. It is plausible that a majority of deans at small schools select their respective employers because they aspire to have a similar intimate professional experience. My perception is that many deans of students at small colleges are themselves the product of similar institutions. This would represent an affinity or tight coupling towards small

collegial institutions (Birnbaum, 1988). These distinguishing features of small colleges was confirmed by the participants in my pilot study. I aspire to serve as a dean of students at a small, private, liberal arts college. My inspiration is clearly tied to my alma mater's collegial environment, and more importantly the close and deeply meaningful relationship I shared with my dean of students.

Liberal Arts Colleges

The following section is dedicated to the exploration of research regarding the liberal arts college as both an experience and an institutional type. I begin by defining the philosophical approach of a liberal education, which is the hallmark of a liberal arts college. I then examine different ways the liberal arts college has been categorized as an institutional type by governing bodies and scholars. The distinct liberal arts college experience and the associated benefits of such an environment of living and learning are interwoven throughout. This section concludes with commentary on the experience of student affairs administrators at liberal arts colleges, highlighting the lack of research available in the scholarly community.

The liberal arts college. Liberal arts colleges are rooted in what the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) defined as a liberal education (AAC&U, 2016). A liberal education is an approach to learning “that empowers individuals with a broad sense of knowledge and transferable skills, and that cultivates social responsibility and a strong sense of ethics and values” (Humphreys, 2006, p. 7). A liberal education is based on the study of the liberal arts, most notably the humanities, sciences, and social sciences (AAC&U, 2016). Furthermore, the AAC&U described a

liberal arts college as a small, primarily residential institution with a liberal arts curriculum and close interaction amongst faculty, staff, and students (AAC&U, 2016). The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education no longer defines a specific category for liberal arts colleges. In its most recent 2015 update, the foundation classified a majority of these institutions in its “Baccalaureate Colleges: Arts & Sciences Focus” designation (Carnegie Classification, 2015). In previous iterations, the Carnegie Classification designated certain institutions as Liberal Arts I and Liberal Arts II classifications, which were based on institutional selectivity, size, and type of degrees awarded (Breneman, 1990).

Lang (1999) described liberal arts colleges as a “distinctly American” institution existing in the United States since the colonial era (p. 133). Baker et al. (2012) and Breneman (1990) highlighted small classes, close relationships, a strong sense of community, residential living, full-time students in the age range of 18 to 24 with a total population of less than 2,500 students, and a curriculum less focused on vocational preparation as key attributes of the liberal arts college. Hirt et al. (2004) and Pascarella et al. (2004) extended that smaller student enrollments and an intimate campus environment create a psychological size that fosters a supportive social-psychological context for community members. Additionally, many of these institutions are private and sometimes guided by religious or other values, which make their mission nuanced as compared to public institutions (Breneman, 1990).

Based on these factors, Baker and Baldwin (2014), Baker et al. (2012), and Breneman (1990) argued that the number of true liberal arts colleges has decreased over

the past several decades. The research of educational economist Breneman (1990) proposed that despite the fact that in 1987 Carnegie classified 540 liberal arts schools, only 212 institutions truly met the essential qualifications to hold the distinction. Applying Breneman's same metrics just over two decades later, Baker and Baldwin (2014) extended that this number decreased to only 130 institutions. Baker and Baldwin (2014) attributed this evolutionary shift to changes in technology, new learning approaches, changing economic and student demographics, along with international competition (Kezar, 2001). Regardless of these evolutionary changes, Baker and Baldwin (2014), Baker et al. (2012), and Breneman (1990) contended the critical value and influential role of liberal arts colleges in the United States higher education system continues.

Scholars Astin (1999), Hu and Kuh (2002), and Pascarella et al. (2004) all supported the valuable attributes of the liberal arts colleges and the distinct benefits they can offer students as compared to their counterparts at research universities and larger comprehensive colleges. Kezar's (2003) research extended this concept, highlighting that interpersonal relationships are common at small colleges due to the close-knit nature of the environment. Hersh (1999) contended that the best education occurs when the false dichotomy between intellectual and socioemotional development is relinquished in favor of a more holistic approach to learning. In his essay, Hersh made a contemporary case for the continued need of residential liberal arts colleges in the 21st century, where such enlightenment and development can flourish. Similarly, Astin (1999) highlighted that "consistently positive student outcomes" are only found at residential liberal arts colleges

(p. 77). Both deans of students that I interviewed in the pilot for this study provided a wealth of stories and recounted specific examples from their careers regarding how working at a liberal arts college allowed them to have consistent interactions with students.

Administrators at liberal arts colleges. Astin (1999) emphasized the importance of the positive relationships and the strong sense of trust between students and administrators fostered at liberal arts colleges. Astin's findings infer the influential role the dean of students serves at small, private, liberal arts colleges. Moreover, Astin's findings can be extended through additional qualitative research that illuminates the lived experiences of deans of students and the meaningful and sustained connections they develop with undergraduate students. Preliminary findings from my pilot study support the importance of the establishment of trust with students and the influential role of the dean of students at small, private, liberal arts colleges. Additional knowledge generated in student affairs divisions at small colleges would further support the importance of the liberal arts college in the United States higher education system. Hirt et al. (2004) noted an imbalance of data on student affairs administrators, with much of data collected excluding those professionals at small colleges. Hirt et al. (2004) synthesized that literature focused specifically on the liberal arts college examined issues related to faculty, students, and academic administrators. Her recommendation made a clear statement that student affairs administrators at these institutions were missing from this narrative.

Liberal arts colleges seek to educate the student as a whole, and this philosophy parallels the approach of student affairs professionals (Hirt et al., 2004). Student development is at the core of the liberal arts college experience and student affairs administrators are often responsible for promoting this type of development. The importance of this connection and the void in the literature demonstrates there is a need for scholarly research on this topic, specifically on the small, private, liberal arts college campus (Bouchard, 2014; Hirt et al., 2004; Tederman, 1997). In further support of this connection, a dean of students can play a major role in student persistence and retention at small colleges (Hagedorn, 2012; Kuh et al., 1991; Tinto, 2005). Deans who participated in my pilot study recounted specific stories of how their interactions with students supported those individuals to stay in school and ultimately complete their academic degrees. Although these connections are meaningful on the interpersonal level, they also support an area of emphasis in the institution's strategic plan, retaining and graduating students. A vast majority of the scholarly literature on deans of students focuses on the earliest deans and the evolution of the position through the 20th century. There is a clear need for further exploration of current deans of students in specific campus environments. As the higher education landscape continues to evolve it is crucial that the knowledgebase on the impact of deans of students at small, private, liberal arts colleges in the 21st century continues to expand.

Guiding Concepts

There are several guiding concepts that contribute to the approach of investigating the experiences of deans of students at small, private, liberal arts colleges. The following

section includes a review of literature as it relates to those concepts. Seminal theories of interpersonal relationship development lay the foundation for understanding the process of deans forming meaningful and sustained connections with undergraduate students. The mentoring process and relationship exemplifies how connections flourish with continued intentional interactions. An exploration of key leadership styles provide context to understand how deans of students serve as leaders in their respective communities. The section concludes with the symbolic representation of archetypes, suggesting how one archetype could be applied to better understand the profession and serve as a guiding model for aspiring deans of students at small, private, liberal arts colleges.

Interpersonal relationships. Psychologist Carl Rogers (1962) spent his life exploring interpersonal relationships. His research served as a seminal theoretical construct for a wide variety of individuals in the helping professions. Rogers' (1962) research provided practical application to professional work involving relationships with people. Originally, his intended audience were guidance counselors, teachers, and therapists, and referred to the dyad using counselor and client labels. Rogers' recommendations translate to the present-day work of student affairs professionals who both educate and guide college students. Rogers (1962) strongest proclamation was that the quality of the interpersonal encounter was the most significant element in determining the effectiveness of the relationship. The higher the quality of the encounter, the more likely the experience promotes optimal personal growth and development for the client

(Rogers, 1962). His views on high quality interpersonal relationships were based on five attitudinal or experiential elements (Rogers, 1962).

Of the five experiential elements, the first four, congruence, empathy, positive regard, and unconditionality of regard, rest upon the counselor, while the final condition is the client's perception (Rogers, 1962). Congruence is based upon the counselor being authentic and real to avoid an unhelpful charade. The authenticity improves communication and the establishment of trust between the two individuals. Empathic understanding permits the counselor to better understand the client's personal experiences. Empathy allows the dyad to further the connection in order to facilitate development. The likelihood of growth is dependent upon a sense of positive regard for the client. This approach means the counselor must embody a favorable level of acceptance of the client regardless of their particular level of development or status. The counselor must lastly value clients in total, accepting them in an unconditional manner. Participants in my pilot study confirmed the importance of an authentic, empathetic, and non-judgmental approach when working with college students. Moreover, the interpersonal connection requires the client to reciprocate and perceive on some level the genuineness of the counselor along with their acceptance and empathy (Rogers, 1962). The exchange of these experiences promotes an effective interpersonal relationship, which in turn fosters individual development.

Rogers' (1962) theory of interpersonal relationships speaks directly to the work of student affairs practitioners, and more specifically deans of students. Deans must be cognizant and focus on ensuring the quality of their interactions in order to develop

meaningful and sustained connections with students. The first engagement could determine the potential for a future positive relationship with a student. Authenticity and empathy serve as the foundation for continued meaningful engagement. Students need to feel comfortable and understood in order to develop trust in administrators. This dynamic is consistent with Astin's (1999) findings on the favorable relations fostered between students and administrators at liberal arts colleges. Deans of students can have a positive influence on the students they serve and the institution as a whole through the purposeful development of quality interpersonal relationships.

The purposeful development of such connections by the dean can be linked to the concept of self-efficacy. Bandura (1997) defined self-efficacy as a person's belief that he or she can act in ways that will produce desired outcomes. Self-efficacy is also directly tied to motivation. If deans of students believe they have the appropriate approach to connecting with students, based on favorable characteristics such as authenticity and empathy, they would be more likely to engage in that type of activity. A dean's motivation to invest time and energy in connecting with students positively influences the likelihood of Rogers' (1962) quality interpersonal encounter. Deans in my pilot study spoke directly about the countless hours and effort they put forth to connect with their community members.

Altman and Taylor's (1973) Social Penetration Theory provides an additional framework to understand the growth of interpersonal relationships. Their work is rooted in theoretical concepts from personality theory and social psychology. Penetration as a concept in itself can be viewed as both a process of entering into something along with a

perceptive understanding of the matter. In some cases, entering into an interpersonal relationship can therefore be an intentional act. This concept further supports Bandura's (1997) impact of self-efficacy and motivation. After interviewing participants from my pilot study, it was clear that they intentionally nurtured relationships with certain students for a variety of reasons. This purposeful act was particularly noteworthy when outreach was made to students who were members of key community organizations or in campus leadership positions.

The social penetration process is influenced by both verbal and nonverbal exchanges, the physical environment, and interpersonal perceptions (Altman & Taylor, 1973). The scholars theorized that meaningful connections are dependent upon communication that develops in a slow and orderly manner. The development is based upon two related dimensions, breadth and depth (Altman & Taylor, 1973). The breadth is related to the number of interactions or the amount of information exchanged, which can be exemplified by the amount of communication over time. Depth speaks to the degree of the exchange, most notably the quality of the interaction. Altman and Taylor (1973) found that the development of a relationship is contingent on the amount and nature of the rewards and costs associated with the interaction. Satisfaction in the relationship is closely dependent upon the benefits experienced in the interpersonal exchange. Participants in my pilot study spoke about specific interactions where both they as the administrator and the student benefitted from the engagement. One detailed account involved a student organization member being actively involved in an evaluation process and therefore feeling valued. Simultaneously, the dean gained meaningful

insight about a dissatisfied faction of students, which informed her knowledgebase and future approach.

Altman and Taylor (1973) used the metaphor of layers of an onion to symbolize the transcendence from an ordinary or superficial relationship to a more significant connection between two people. Just like the outer layer of an onion, the public self is what students might reveal to any common acquaintance or community member. New layers are exposed with additional self-disclosure of personal details and beliefs being shared over time. The capacity for the development of sharing can be positively influenced by the authenticity and empathy highlighted in Rogers (1962) interpersonal relationships. Reciprocal sharing is central to the Social Penetration Theory (Altman & Taylor, 1973). A student feeling comfortable to gradually share personal information, and then the deans reciprocate by sharing their own experiences, supports the establishment of a strong and genuine connection. Participants in my pilot study clearly articulated the importance of sharing aspects of their personal and professional life with students in certain situations. This reciprocal sharing helped deans advance towards meaningful and sustained connections with students.

The development of the connection between a dean of students and a student is based upon a gradual progression influenced by increased interactions, mutual exchange of personal information, and most importantly the quality of the interaction. This connection will grow stronger and therefore become meaningful if both parties are able to identify benefits from their association with one another. Although both individuals could share similar rewards, it is likely that each would have their unique benefits. In the

pilot study, it was discovered that deans were able to better understand the needs of the greater campus community and therefore be seen as more caring if they were able to develop meaningful connections with certain student leaders. This connection positively influenced the level of trust in the community. In turn, the deans believed the students felt a level of satisfaction when given the opportunity to voice their concerns and be understood by a member of the administrative leadership. The sustained interaction with the dean also contributed to the personal growth of the student as an individual. This type of dyad increases the likelihood for the transition to a mentoring relationship.

Mentoring. Mentoring is a key concept that reveals the potential positive outcomes of a meaningful connection between an administrator and a student. Crisp and Cruz (2009) provided a comprehensive overview of the literature related to mentoring college students over the past several decades. They noted how the idea of mentoring college students can be approached as either a specific set of activities or as a concept of process. Luna and Cullen (1995) demonstrated that college student mentoring can vary in a variety of ways including informal or formal, short-lived or long-term, and planned or spontaneous relationships. Roberts (2000) defined mentoring as, “a formalized process whereby a more knowledgeable and experienced person actuates a supportive role of overseeing and encouraging reflection and learning within a less experienced and knowledgeable person, so as to facilitate that persons’ career and personal development” (p. 162). Deans in my pilot study told stories of mentoring relationships that developed informally out of positive campus activities and formally through student conduct cases and crisis situations.

Caring leaders who engage in the developmental role of working closely with undergraduates represent a key component of the dean of students profession throughout history (Nidiffer, 2000; Schwartz, 2010). Astin's (1999) findings of positive relationships and the strong sense of trust between students and administrators at liberal arts colleges directly relates to such mentoring affiliations. A more intimate campus environment, smaller enrollments, and the dean having diverse work responsibilities that require collaboration with students all factor into the capability for deans of students to foster mentoring relationships with students at small, private, liberal arts colleges (Bass, 2006; Bouchard, 2014; Flanagan 2006; Tederman, 1997; Westfall, 2006). An examination of potential leadership styles of a dean of students would provide valuable context to further understand the process of developing connections with students.

Leadership. The following sections will address the influence of leadership style and the importance it has on the ability of deans to foster connections with students. Bolman and Gallos's (2011) frame will serve as the foundation to understand the overarching work of the dean. Greenleaf's (1970) concept of servant leadership will highlight the perspective and behaviors of the dean as an altruistic leader. Burns's (1978) transformational leadership extends the exploration and helps explain how deans influence others and why they are able to develop meaningful and sustained connections with students.

Leadership frame. Bolman and Gallos (2011) represented academic leaders fostering a productive campus using the frame of the leader as a servant. This concept employs the metaphor of the campus community as an extended family with various

levels of interconnection (Bolman & Gallos, 2011). Participants from my pilot likened themselves to both parental and pastoral roles. The basis of this frame is focused on being dedicated to the people in the community. The currency for this type of leadership style is based simply on care for others. In this frame, leaders make an impact through empowerment, open communication, and support (Bolman & Gallos, 2011).

I apply this servant frame to the dean of students because of their unwavering service and oversight of the care and safety of the student body. Nidiffer (2000) and Schwartz (2010) detailed countless examples of deans of men and women who devoted their time and energy to serve as dedicated advocates for students. As the higher education landscape evolved over the years, the deans highlighted by these two scholars continually focused on the health and well-being of the community to best support student success. The deans made themselves accessible to students in order to understand their needs and be effective advocates and catalysts for change. Through this type of constant care and support, deans are able to empower and inspire students while serving as leaders for their development and success.

Servant leadership. Greenleaf (1970) wrote about the concept of servant leadership from the perspective of the leader, focusing specifically on behavior in conjunction with others. This approach is both a leadership philosophy and a set of practices, based on ethics to serve the greater good (Northouse, 2013). Servant leaders put the needs of their follower first, helping others develop and perform to their potential (Northouse, 2013). This style of leadership is centered around how leaders treat others and the subsequent outcomes of those interactions. With an emphasis on empathetic and

nurturing qualities, servant leadership resonates with Rogers' (1962) model of authentic, high-quality interactions and experiences shared by deans in my pilot study. Moreover, servant leadership values face-to-face interactions for the development of interdependence, respect, trust, and individual growth, furthering supporting Rogers (1962) and Altman and Taylor's (1973) views on interpersonal relationships (Greenleaf, 1970).

Servant leadership is an ideal approach when the leader possesses altruistic qualities, with clear motivation and a strong commitment to advocating for community members (Northouse, 2013). Bandura's (1997) concept of self-efficacy and the importance of motivation in terms of serving others can clearly be intertwined with Greenleaf's (1970) writings. Servant leadership is optimized when the leader is invested in building long-term relationships (Linden, Wayne, Zhao, & Henderson, 2008). This pledge to community members supports the impetus for this inquiry on the meaningful and sustained connections deans develop with students. Spears (2002) extended Greenleaf's work by identifying 10 characteristics that are central to servant leadership. Those attributes are: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to growth of people, and building community. These characteristics align with the central themes to Bolman and Gallos' (2011) frame of the leader as a servant.

Transformational leadership. Burns (1978) developed the concept of transformational leadership to explain the process of engaging with others in such a way that enhances the motivation of both the leader and the follower. In the case of this

study, the dean of students exemplifies the former and undergraduate students the latter. This approach resonates with the work of Altman and Taylor (1973), Bandura (1997), and Rogers (1962). The practice of transformational leadership changes and transforms people (Northouse, 2013). This symbiotic style of leadership showcases situations when the leader works with others to identify needed organizational change, creation of a vision to guide change through inspiration, and the execution of change in tandem with committed members of the group (Burns, 1978). Deans from my pilot study detailed stories when they worked directly with student community members to facilitate positive change through the development of a shared vision. Transformational leaders are generally charismatic, attentive to their followers, and vision-oriented (Northouse, 2013). These transformational leadership qualities are reminiscent of the historical accounts of the earliest deans of men and women highlighted by Nidiffer (2000) and Schwartz (2010).

Bass (1985) extended Burns' (1978) theory by further developing the concept of transformational leadership by adding a focus on the involvement and influence of followers (Northouse, 2013). Bass's (1985) extension of transformational leadership included four categories: idealized influence, individualized consideration, inspirational motivation, and intellectual stimulation. Idealized influence represents the charismatic power of the leader, serving as a strong role model or mentor. This influence is rooted in deep respect and trust, related to Astin's (1999) previous findings of relationships developed at liberal arts colleges. The leader focuses on individuals, carefully listening to and considering the unique needs of each member. This individualized consideration

fosters a supportive environment allowing members to become fully engaged. The one-on-one interaction exemplifies Rogers' (1962) purposeful development of quality interpersonal relationships and emphasizes the bond between followers and leaders in the transformation process (Northouse, 2013). By establishing respect and trust along with personalized care, the charismatic leader encourages others to follow their mission. This inspirational motivation compels group members to become part of the shared vision by emphasizing each individual's efforts as being crucial for the community. Through intellectual stimulation the leader encourages others to explore new approaches and design innovative solutions to overcome challenges.

Leaders can employ a transformational approach to “develop and cultivate [and] empower rather than manipulate” (Kezar, Carducci & Contreras-McGavin, 2006, p. 37). This style of leadership has influence from both ethical and moral components (Manning, 2013). In a higher education setting, leaders can promote social justice values as a transformative force to positively influence the development of the community (Aguirre & Martinez, 2006). Deans who act as transformational leaders empower students and have the dedication to nurture them to support change by serving as a mentor (Northouse, 2013). Favorable leadership qualities and engagement in positive mentoring relationships translate to a certain philosophical type for the dean of students.

Archetypes. Pearson (1998) wrote that an archetype is a fundamental structure of the psyche, which is based on Jung's notion of the collective unconscious. Pearson associated archetypes with deep and abiding patterns in the human psyche that remain powerful and present over time. One might think of an archetype as a typical example of

a distinct quality or a reoccurring symbolic representation. Pearson (1998) posited that archetypes are inner potentialities or guides that are ever present. In her book *The Hero Within* (1998), Pearson proposed six metaphors: altruist, innocent, magician, orphan, wanderer, and warrior to exemplify leadership archetypes. These symbolic representations have been applied to educators in various educational settings. Pearson (1998) believed that an individual could exemplify qualities of each representation in different combinations, but one archetype could specifically be manifested as their central archetype. Pearson (1998) wrote about the importance of overall balance among representations and cautioned that dominant archetypes could have drawbacks. As an example, overly dominant altruistic tendencies could cause an individual to make too many sacrifices. Rather, an altruist may at times need to channel the warrior qualities to fight on behalf of or with students depending on the situation.

Research conducted by Reibold (2003) applied the concept of archetype to professionalism, wherein participants constructed their own guiding mental models for their profession. This concept is based off the work of Bruss and Kopala (1993) who understood professional identity as “the formation of an attitude of personal responsibility regarding one’s role in the profession, a commitment to behave ethically and morally, and the development of feelings of pride for the profession” (p. 686). This definition resembles many of the deans’ personal philosophies regarding their profession as highlighted by Nidiffer (2000) and Schwartz (2010). Although most of Pearson’s (1998) representations can be applied to deans of students depending on the situation and context, one of the six archetypes can best represent the role of the dean of students. The

altruist is a “giving and compassionate individual who is committed to the greater good of others” (Pearson, 1998, p. 18). This symbolic representation aligns with leadership concepts previously highlighted by numerous scholars (Bolman & Gallos, 2011; Burns, 1978; Geenleaf, 1970; Northouse, 2013).

Altruists care for the community and are generous in a variety of ways (Pearson, 1998). This archetype is exemplified by the dean of students’ care for the student body through the time and effort they dedicate to those they serve. Through such commitment and sacrifice to others, altruists are agents of change. This symbolic representation of the dean of students is congruent with Bolman and Gallos’ (2011) frame of a leader as a servant, catalyst, and a coach. I believe there is a dean of students archetype that currently exists and draws inspiration from the approach of the early deans. There are adaptive, charismatic leaders who are deeply committed to mentoring students and serving the needs of the modern day small, private, liberal arts college. They are the living relics that preserve the fundamental role of the earliest deans of students. Similar to Reybold’s (2003) participants’ guiding mental models for their profession, current deans of students in my study may also provide insight that helps formulate a better understanding of their attitude and professional approach.

Summary

This chapter began with a historical exploration of the dean of students position in the United States higher education system. An overview of liberal arts colleges provided insight into the specific type of institutional environment I seek to better understand. I

then detailed the guiding concepts that give context to my research. In the following chapter, I explain the methodology used in this study.

Chapter Three

In order to better understand how deans of students at small, private, liberal arts colleges develop meaningful and sustained connections with undergraduate students, an overview of the literature that informed the methodology of my study will be presented. First, I will initially present my conceptual framework of methods, detailing how I approached the research study. I use the term perspective to explain how individuals make realizations based on the combination of cognition and beliefs. I follow up with a review of literature that informed my overall design and methods, including data analysis techniques. The methods in this chapter are also influenced by an insightful pilot study, which I refer to throughout in relation to how that experience impacted decisions made for the continuation of this study. A subsequent discussion on quality and trustworthiness features a symbolic metaphor. My ethical approach as a researcher is brought to the forefront and served as a compass for my exploration. The chapter concludes with boundaries and limitations of the study.

Philosophical Approach

A theoretical perspective is a collection of related assumptions and concepts that serve as a guide to view the world and make sense of a complex phenomenon (Luttrell, 2010). Moreover, a researcher's theoretical perspective determines their respective ways of knowing about a given subject or phenomenon by taking a philosophical approach that

informs methodology (Koro-Ljungberg, Yendol-Hoppey, Smith, & Hayes, 2009). In turn these decisions dictate the research methods and subsequent quality of the study. In the following section I discuss the terms ontology and epistemology, and explain how they framed my research philosophy. Ontology speaks to the nature of existence and reality, while epistemology relates to the nature of human knowledge (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013; Glesne, 2011).

The term ontology describes how the world exists, or more specifically, how the researcher views the world and the nature of reality (Glesne, 2011; Maxwell, 2013). My ontological stance determined how I perceived reality and made sense of the world. I did not attempt to capture measurements or isolate one single identifiable reality to make predictions as represented by the positivist ontological stance (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013; Glesne, 2011). This stance would not provide the appropriate means to explore the experiences of deans of students and would not accurately answer the given research questions. My ontological stance was to explore the multiple realities, or interpretations of the realities, that exist in the world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013; Merriam, 2009). I believe there is no singular or empirical perspective of reality (Merriam, 2009). Patton (2015) illuminated this stance from a cognitive psychological position by quoting Aldous Huxley's famous thought, "there are things known and there are things unknown, and in between are the doors of perception" (p. 126). Huxley's idea supports the ontological view of multiple, socially constructed realities. I do not support the idea of alternative facts, rather I value what lies in between the doors of perception. I believe there are facts, but more significantly the concept of how individuals realize facts through their

perspective, which is based on the combination of cognition and beliefs. The importance of perspective resonated within me as a researcher. The transactional value of this philosophy positions that the knower (researcher) and the known (participant) are simultaneously interactive and inseparable (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013; Luttrell, 2010). My ontological stance and epistemological approach relied heavily on the value and meaning of multiple perspectives.

Koro-Ljungberg, et al., (2009) noted that qualitative researchers traverse through a series of decision junctures in order to fully develop and justify their methodological philosophy. I studied and evaluated numerous ontological postures before carefully and consciously taking my stance. My ontological stance represented the pathway to enlightenment along this journey of deep understanding. My epistemological approach served as the vehicle to navigate further along this ontological pathway.

The term epistemology describes the study of the nature of knowledge and defines the relationship between the inquirer and the known (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013; Glesne, 2011). A constructivist approach to generating knowledge relates to meaning being developed when individuals interact and attempt to make sense of others' lives (Glesne, 2011; Merriam, 2009). A constructivist epistemology values the transactional nature of knowledge (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). The researcher and participant are viewed as one symbiotic entity in this approach. A constructivist approach "sees both data and analysis as created from shared experiences and relationships with participants and other sources of data" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 130). The knower creates knowledge through interpretation with the help of the known and the knower assists the known in ascribing meaning to

their experiences. Constructivism is situated in the natural world and linked to Piagetian psychology (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2013). By taking this approach, I believed that truth can be relative and dependent on individual perspectives. This practice placed value on the subjective creation of meaning. A constructivist epistemological approach “points out the unique experience in each of us” (Crotty, 1998, p. 58).

The social construction of knowledge opposes the approach of depicting reality objectively and instead emphasizes the uniqueness of shared experiences and the multiplicity of perspectives (Patton, 2015). A constructivist epistemology incorporates the researcher’s own experiences to make sense of the world in which we live in and the actions in question. A constructivist researcher acknowledges that they cannot fully remove the self from what is known and how that knowledge is generated. Individuals are influenced through a series of lived experiences, which continually resurface and influence the construction of knowledge (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). As a researcher, I harnessed historical lessons from the past in order to vividly interpret in the present. My unique frame of reference was important to consider in this study. My ontological stance and my epistemological approach were compatible and informed my research methods.

Conceptual framework. I aspire to serve as a dean of students at a small, private, liberal arts college. My inspiration is clearly tied to my alma mater’s collegial environment, and more importantly, the close and deeply meaningful relationship I shared with my dean of students. These personal experiences with the dean as a young college student had a profound impact on my life and overall development. My experience exemplifies scholarship that positions student development as optimally

facilitated when faculty, staff, and students have established relationships and frequently interact with one another (Kuh et al., 1991). My relationship with my undergraduate dean of students served as a compelling force to gain a deeper understanding of how and why a dean of students develops a meaningful and sustained relationship with a student. My subjectivity as a researcher made a positive contribution to the study, allowing me to situate the self in relation to the inquiry (Reybold, Lammert, & Stribling, 2013).

Like Leigh (2013), I also identified as an insider in this scenario. I currently work in the field of student affairs and graduated from a small, private liberal arts college, so I am deeply familiar with the professional duties and responsibilities of my participants. Leigh (2013) described an insider as one with intimate knowledge and access, which differs from Ghaffar-Kucher's (2014) depiction of the native researcher as a scholar with the same national, ethnic, or religious identity as their participants. My insider's perspective is based on environmental context along with my professional experience and identity.

I sought to understand the process of how deans of students develop meaningful and sustained connections with undergraduate students. Qualitative inquiry aims to understand the interpretation of experiences of participants through rich descriptions of the social world (Merriam, 2009). Qualitative researchers seek to make sense of actions and the meanings associated with a phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013; Glesne, 2011). Only a qualitative methodological approach would allow me to uncover the meaning behind these actions to more clearly understand the experience (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013; Glesne, 2011; Luttrell, 2010; Maxwell, 2013; Patton, 2015).

The focus of this study was to explore the experiences of deans of students at small, private, liberal arts colleges in relation to the meaningful and sustained connections they form with undergraduate students. The following research questions guided the inquiry:

- 1- How and under what context does a dean of students develop meaningful and sustained connections with undergraduate students at a small, private, liberal arts college?
- 2- What are the benefits of the meaningful and sustained connections between deans of students and undergraduate students? What are the benefits to the institution? What are the benefits to students?

My intention was to construct meaning by joining participants on a retrospective reflection on the process of developing connections with students to further understand the dean's perspective. Factors that encourage close interaction with students are a more intimate campus environment, smaller student enrollments, and the dean having diverse work responsibilities that require collaboration with students (Bass, 2006; Bouchard, 2014; Flanagan 2006; Tederman, 1997; Westfall, 2006;). Scholars defined this concept as the psychological size and the supportive social-psychological context that encourages engagement and close relationships between administration and students (Hirt et al., 2004; Pascarella, et al., 2004).

I took an a priori approach since I did not isolate one specific theoretical concept that best applied to the investigation of my study. This approach was informed by several guiding concepts including those based on interpersonal relationships, leadership,

mentoring, and archetypes. The goal of this study was to illuminate a clear perspective on the role and behavior of individuals in the dean of students position to therefore expand the understanding of an area that is generally underrepresented in the higher education scholarly literature (Bouchard, 2014; Hirt et al., 2004; Tederman, 1997). The enhanced understanding contributes to both the growing body of research and the implementation of programs and services and the approach of future deans at small, private, liberal arts colleges. A supporting goal was to illuminate the beneficial role these individuals play in the lives of students and for their respective institutions.

Patton (2015) noted that qualitative research is personal and the researcher serves as the instrument of inquiry. An extension of this concept is that the researcher's historical background and personal experiences inherently influence the inquiry perspective and approach. A constructivist approach is based on the idea that perceptions are socially or co-constructed and therefore not an isolated process (Merriam, 2009). Constructivism therefore favors a view of multiple realities, or interpretations of realities of both the participant and the researcher (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013; Merriam, 2009). Patton (2015) continued that qualitative research "provides a point of intersection between the personal and professional" (p. 33). This point of intersection allows qualitative researchers to immerse themselves in the phenomenon they are compelled to understand. My own historical background and familiarity of experiencing a close connection with my undergraduate dean of students illustrates this point of intersection between the personal and professional realms. A qualitative approach allowed me to gain perspective through interactions with my research participants regarding their

experiences with students. Qualitative inquiry aims to prompt the interpretation of participant experiences through rich descriptions of the social world (Merriam, 2009).

Methodology

A case study design affords qualitative researchers the opportunity to focus on exploring and understanding a case in a bounded context (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Stake, 1995, 2006). I did not wish to research a general topic; rather a specific case with clear and calculated boundaries (Stake, 1995). The parameters of my research design illuminated my precise compelling interest regarding deans of students at small, private, liberal arts colleges. Qualitative case studies permit empathetic understanding through thick description, experiential understanding, and multiple perspectives (Stake, 1995). A case study design allows the researcher to explore these multiple perspectives, which aligns with the constructivist approach. (Stake, 1995). A case study served as the design of the research project along with the product of that inquiry process (Stake, 2006).

My research study design was an intrinsic, single case, multisite case study (Anaf, Drummond, & Sheppard, 2007; Stake, 1995). An intrinsic case study is an appropriate design for researchers with a genuine interest whose goal is to better understand the given case (Stake, 1995). Single case studies center around one specific case, and multisite studies explore this single case at more than one particular location (Anaf et al., 2007; Baxter & Jack, 2008; Stake, 1995). The unit of analysis, or case in this study, was the deans of students. The boundary of this case study was a collection of small, private, liberal arts colleges from two exemplary consortiums of institutions in the Mid-Atlantic region. I had a genuine interest to understand the context and process of how deans of

students develop meaningful connections with undergraduate students at small, private, liberal arts colleges.

I conducted a pilot study to explore my ideas and methods, while simultaneously exploring their implications (Maxwell, 2013.) This initial study provided me with an enhanced understanding of both my prospective participants along with their experiences developing connections with undergraduate students. I was able to test out my data collection techniques and initial analysis process. The pilot study helped to refine my research questions in order to prepare me for further data collection (Glesne, 2011). During the pilot study I interacted with two deans of students, Ethel and Marcy, who each chose their own pseudonym. I intentionally selected these two participants for my pilot study due to their abundance of service time as dean at their current institutions, with 26 and 21 years respectively. These two participants provided me with a wealth of useful information about my topic and helped pave the way for the expansion of my study.

Methods

Site and participant selection. Hirt et al. (2004) noted a disaggregation of data on student affairs administrators with a vast majority of research excluding small colleges. Due to the lack of scholarly insight on this significant subset of the United States higher education landscape, it was imperative for this study's design to be focused specifically on the small, private, liberal arts campus. The design of this study was simultaneously codependent upon the individual in this role and the small, private, liberal arts college setting. By "thinking forward" I made a commitment to my selection choices and the potential outcome of those conscious decisions (Reybold et al., 2013, p. 704).

The dean of students and the institution type were inherently conjoined for the purpose of this study.

Setting. The setting of this study was a collection of small, private, liberal arts colleges from two consortiums in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. This categorical type of institution is relatively common in this area of the country (Breneman, 1994). This locality provided a fertile selection of institutions to target for this study. Two specific consortiums were selected due to not only the proximity, but more importantly the distinct nature of the institutions within the consortium. I created pseudonyms for both the consortiums, the Memorial Conference and the Monument Conference, along with pseudonyms for each individual college. The member institutions from these two consortiums shared many commonalities including academic reputation, campus size, student population, and setting. The institutional similarities were confirmed in my pilot study site visits. There were a total of 19 institutions between the two consortiums. Six institutions were selected for this study based on criteria of both the individual colleges and their respective deans, which will be explained in a latter section on participants.

I made a purposeful decision to select a setting that offers the optimum environment to answer the given research questions of this study (Reybold et al., 2013; Stake, 1995). My own positionality also factored into the selection of the research setting (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013; Jones, et al., 2013). As a graduate of a small, private, liberal arts college, I desired to gain deeper insight into the professional lives of deans of students and their meaningful and sustained connections with students. The criteria

fulfilled by the institutions selected for this study provided the ideal setting to further understand the experiences of deans of students at small, private, liberal arts colleges.

Memorial Conference. The Memorial Conference is a collection of 11 institutions situated in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. Member institutions are located in two states. The Memorial Conference is a National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division III athletic conference. Many of the member institutions share a similar institutional classification, national ranking, setting, and student population. With the exception of one school, all institutions in the conference are highly selective, small, private, liberal arts colleges. Four institutions from the Memorial Conference, Adams College, Fox College, Hill College, and Spring College, were included in this study.

Adams College. Adams College is a private, coeducational, secular, liberal arts college located in the Mid-Atlantic region. With approximately 2,400 undergraduate students, Adams College has a 9:1 student-faculty ratio and offers 37 academic majors. The college's level of selectivity is categorized as more selective. The institution's official charter dates back to the 1830s.

Adams College participates in the Memorial Division III athletic conference. As a primarily residential college, 94% of students live in campus housing. The cost of attendance including tuition along with room and board exceeds \$65,000 a year. The college's endowment is estimated at \$293 million. There are approximately 120 student clubs and organizations with 16 fraternities and sororities at Adams College.

Located in a primarily rural area with a nearby residential borough, Adams College is situated in a historically relevant location. The picturesque 230-acre campus is centralized, with almost all of the approximately 95 buildings clustered in one clearly defined area. The campus has a wide-open feel with copious amounts of space and beautifully maintained grounds. Many of the original buildings still stand, which epitomizes the traditional collegiate environment. The physical appearance of the campus further accentuates the historical influence and significance of the area.

The mission of the college is to provide a residential liberal arts education to engage students from around the world for a life of personal and professional satisfaction. The institution's goal is to engage students in complex questions through leadership and socially responsible citizenship.

Fox College. Fox College is a private, coeducational, secular, liberal arts college located in the Mid-Atlantic region. With approximately 1,600 undergraduate students, Fox College has a 11:1 student-faculty ratio and offers 36 academic majors. The college's level of selectivity is categorized as more selective. The institution's official charter dates back to the 1860s.

Fox College participates in the Memorial Division III athletic conference. As a primarily residential college, 96% of students live in campus housing. The cost of attendance including tuition along with room and board exceeds \$63,000 a year. The college's endowment is estimated at \$137 million. There are approximately 100 student clubs and organizations with 13 fraternities and sororities at Fox College.

Located in a suburban area occupying 170 acres of land, Fox College is a charming campus with over 70 buildings. The campus has a welcoming vibe with a plethora of green space extending in a northerly direction. A considerable collection of intriguing artwork is situated throughout the grounds and provides a unique atmosphere. At almost a century and a half old, there is a healthy mixture of both historic and contemporary structures throughout campus.

The mission of the college is to encourage students to become independent, accountable, and selfless. The liberal education prepares students to live innovatively and usefully, in order to provide guidance for their society in an interdependent world.

Hill College. Hill College is a private, coeducational, secular, liberal arts college located in the Mid-Atlantic region. With approximately 1,600 undergraduate students, Hill College has a 10:1 student-faculty ratio and offers 27 academic majors. The college's level of selectivity is categorized as selective. The institution's official charter dates back to the 1860s.

Hill College participates in the Memorial Division III athletic conference. As a primarily residential college, 82% of students live in campus housing. The cost of attendance including tuition along with room and board exceeds \$53,000 a year. The college's endowment is estimated at \$110 million. There are approximately 90 student clubs and organizations with 12 fraternities and sororities at Hill College.

Located in a suburban area occupying 160 acres of land, Hill College is an inviting campus with over 65 buildings. Fittingly, the campus sits atop a naturally raised area of land perched above the surrounding town. The campus has an endearing and

uniform appearance, thanks in part to the primarily red brick buildings. Most of the structures are closely clustered in a confined area, giving the campus an intimate feel.

The mission of the college is to challenge students to develop their unique potentials with purpose, ingenuity, and human concern through a commitment to excellence in the liberal arts. The college's goal is to prepare students for prosperous lives of leadership, community service, and social accountability.

Spring College. Spring College is a private, coeducational, secular, liberal arts college located in the Mid-Atlantic region. With approximately 2,300 undergraduate students, Spring College has a 9:1 student-faculty ratio and offers 35 academic majors. The college's level of selectivity is categorized as more selective. The institution's official charter dates back to the 1780s.

Spring College participates in the Memorial Division III athletic conference. As a primarily residential college, 99% of students live in campus housing. The cost of attendance including tuition along with room and board exceeds \$68,000 a year. The college's endowment is estimated at \$328 million. There are approximately 140 student clubs and organizations with 11 fraternities and sororities.

The campus is situated on the western outskirts of a historic urban area occupying 200 acres of land. Spring College is a picturesque campus of over 65 buildings, with much of the architecture being in excess of 200 years old. The grounds are immaculate and exude an aura of excellence. Spring College's campus appearance equally matches the institution's elite national academic reputation. The magnificent historic campus

embodies the essential characteristics of the traditional all-American collegiate environment.

The mission of the college is to motivate students to learn and think critically, to instill a capacity for independence and collaboration, and to explore and understand the complex world in which they live. This residential college liberal arts college seeks to nurture intellect, originality, and character for gratifying lives and significant contributions to the world.

Monument Conference. The Monument Conference is a collection of eight institutions situated in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. Member institutions are located in four states. The Monument Conference is a National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division III athletic conference. Many of the member institutions share a similar institutional classification, national ranking, setting, and student population. A majority of institutions in the conference are selective, small, private, liberal arts colleges. Two institutions from the Monument Conference, Laurel College and North College, were included in this study.

Laurel College. Laurel College is a private, coeducational, secular, liberal arts college located in the Mid-Atlantic region. With approximately 1,500 undergraduate students, Laurel College has a 10:1 student-faculty ratio and offers 35 majors. The college's level of selectivity is categorized as selective. The institution's official charter dates back to the 1880s.

Laurel College participates in the Monument Division III athletic conference. As a primarily residential college, 84% of students live in campus housing. The cost of

attendance including tuition along with room and board exceeds \$56,000 a year. The college's endowment is estimated at \$201 million. There are approximately 60 student clubs and organizations. At one point in time there was thriving sorority population, but the college does not currently have a Greek Life system.

Located in a suburban space just outside an urban setting, Laurel College is like an oasis, with the grounds enclosed by a tree line that separates the campus from the surrounding area. The campus occupies 287 acres of land with over 50 buildings. The campus is comprised of predominantly stone buildings that provide a consistent appearance. During the site visit, a great deal of construction was taking place in the center of campus, mainly in residential areas. There was an interesting juxtaposition of what appeared to be outdated buildings and modern architecture.

The mission of the college is to provide a liberal arts education that prepares students with an extensive and compassionate viewpoint for a life of discovery, creativity, and logical thinking. The college's goal is to become the hallmark for accessible transformational education that merges curricular and experiential learning to help students solve multifaceted problems together within a diverse world.

North College. North College is a private, coeducational, religiously-affiliated, liberal arts college located in the Mid-Atlantic region. With approximately 2,000 undergraduate students, North College has a 12:1 student-faculty ratio and offers 39 academic majors. The college's level of selectivity is categorized as selective. The institution's official charter dates back to the 1740s.

North College participates in the Monument Division III athletic conference. As a primarily residential college, 67% of students live in campus housing. The cost of attendance including tuition along with room and board exceeds \$55,000 a year. The college's endowment is estimated at \$102 million. There are approximately 80 student clubs and organizations with a total of eight fraternities and sororities at North College.

The college is located in a more subdued area in the northwest corner of an urban setting. The campus occupies 86 acres of land with over 55 buildings. North College is known for being one of the oldest institutions in the country. The majestic stone buildings preserve that historical identity. The college is noticeably a key part of the greater surrounding community. That level of interconnectedness provides a certain energy to the campus.

The mission of the college is to provide a liberal arts education to prepare students for a thoughtful life, satisfying career, and transformative leadership in an evolving society. The college believes in the beneficial power of the liberal arts that provides students exhilarating ways to discover their own identity.

Participants. The strategy for selecting participants in this study was one of group characteristic sampling. Purposeful homogenous sampling allowed for the study of individuals that share similar characteristics (Patton, 2015). The selection criterion allowed me to explore a specific subgroup, deans of students working at small, private, liberal arts colleges, in great depth. I specifically targeted individuals that represented critical cases of the phenomena that I was compelled to investigate (Maxwell, 2013; Weiss, 1994). My criterion was to select participants with at least five full years of

service as dean of students at their respective institutions. This baseline level of service supported the possibility that each participant had ample opportunity to become fully immersed in their campus and establish relationships with students (Tederman, 1997). During the pilot study, my campus observations led to a clear understanding that the two deans were well-connected with students in the college community. The participants in my study all served as dean at their respective institutions for at least five years. Selecting participants with at least five years of service at their current institution not only provided a scenario that supported adequate professional experience, it also essentially guaranteed that the individual served as dean for each respective class when they matriculated as first-year students.

I secured six deans from the two consortiums as participants for my research study, and two of these individuals participated in my pilot study. There were a total of 19 institutions between the two consortiums; three were immediately eliminated from the study as they were classified as universities and not liberal arts colleges. Six additional deans were excluded from consideration because they were each recently appointed as dean and did not meet the minimum selection criteria of five years of service. Four of the 10 eligible deans declined my invitation to serve as participants in this study. Each of the six participants selected their own pseudonym: Ethel from Adams College, Marcy from Fox College, Beth from Hill College, Bryan from Laurel College, Rebecca from North College, and Jill from Spring College. Additional descriptions of each participant will be further detailed in the next chapter.

The intention for the size of my participant pool was not one of breadth to make generalizations across a larger population, but rather to explore the practices of these individuals in great depth (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013; Glesne, 2011; Luttrell, 2010; Maxwell, 2013; Patton, 2015). I gathered information-rich cases to provide valuable insight from a smaller number of participants (Patton, 2015). The theoretical perspective and design of this study did not intend to investigate participants from a particular class such as age, gender, race, sexual orientation, or any other form of identity (Koro-Ljungberg, et al., 2009; Patton, 2015). The focus was to explore the experiences of deans of students with a minimum of five years of service at their respective small, private, liberal arts colleges.

Data collection. The implementation of multiple sources of direct and indirect data allowed me to understand the case through a variety of lenses (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Initial data collection began in fall 2016 with two participants as part of an IRB-approved pilot study. The pilot study allowed me to further investigate relevant literature, explore the experiences of current deans, and examine my proposed methods. I spent a significant amount of time with the two initial participants and I intentionally decided to include them in my developing dissertation study. After the formal portion of those initial visits, I was able to casually debrief the experience with each participant as part of the pilot study development process. This exchange allowed me to ask the two deans their opinions about the clarity and appropriateness of the interview questions along with their view of the overall participant experience. These conversations were useful as I received positive feedback regarding the data collection and site visit experience.

Data collection continued with additional participants in fall 2017 after I received IRB approval for my dissertation study (Appendix A). Each participant signed a statement of informed consent (Appendix B). Initial data collection began with an in-depth, semi-structured, stationary interview conducted with each participant. A semi-structured interview allowed flexible probing in response to unexpected leads and the emerging worldview of the participant in order to gain the fullest understanding (Glesne, 2011; Merriam, 2009). Interviews were the most direct way to tap into the multiple realities of the participants in my case study (Stake, 1995). By taking a constructivist approach, I believe that truth is relative and dependent on individual perspectives of both my participants and myself as the researcher (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2015). Campus tours expanded the interaction between the researcher and participant, while simultaneously providing an avenue for observation. Document review provided additional context for understanding each of the participants and their respective college communities. Reflective researcher memos and participant reflective journals extended contemplation and provided additional analytical insight.

Stationary office interviews. The initial source of data was uncovered through an in-depth interview with each participant. These initial interviews were stationary; with each participant and I seated in the dean's office. Subsequent data collection took place during a walking mobile campus tour, which will be detailed in the following section. The researcher coauthored the interviewee's subjective experience of serving as a dean of students by actively contributing to the unfolding series of follow up questions to access vivid descriptions and facilitate deep understanding (Kvale, 1996). Interviews provided

access to interior perspectives and allow researchers to create meaning when they are unable to directly observe behaviors and feelings (Merriam 2009; Weiss, 1994). Interviews helped to uncover participants' feelings and thoughts in order to best understand their personal experiences (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2015). The production of knowledge through an interview with a participant aligns with a constructivist epistemological approach (Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2009).

Each stationary interview lasted between 60 to 90 minutes. Interviews were recorded using a digital device with the participant's consent for future transcription and analysis purposes. The interview was conducted in the participant's office. This familiar setting was selected to increase the level of comfort for the participant during the interview. I was aware of the whole office environment and recorded field notes on insightful artifacts in the office. Charmaz (2006) stated that "all are data" regarding the variety of sources during the interview and research process (p. 16).

The interview was semi-structured, which allowed flexible probing in response to unexpected leads and the individualized nature of the interactions with each participant to gain the fullest understanding (Glesne, 2011; Maxwell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). Interviews were the most direct way to tap into the multiple realities of the participants in my case study (Stake, 1995). Examples of questions asked during the interview were: "What is your approach to working with students as the dean?" and "What factors contribute to you being able to make a meaningful connection with a student?" An interview protocol (Appendix C) was used to guide the conversation with each participant in order to address key areas of exploration. I utilized various follow-up questions to co-

construct a deeper understanding of the participant's experiences (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The data collected from the interviews was initially transcribed through a transcription service. I listened to each interview audio recording three times to improve the accuracy of the transcription and to become increasingly familiar with the content. The stationary interviews conducted with the two deans from my pilot study provided valuable insight regarding the context and process of developing meaningful and sustained connections with undergraduate students, which extended through the rest of my site visits.

Mobile interviews. A secondary source of data collection extended the conversation with each participant by way of a walking or mobile interview (Brown & Durrheim, 2009; Carpiano, 2009; Evans & Jones, 2011; Harris, 2016; Kusenbach, 2003). Brown and Durrheim (2009) conducted walking interviews to enhance interaction with their participants, with the physical movement playing an influential role in the exchange. Kusenbach (2003) and Evans and Jones' (2011) research noted that walking interviews utilize the environment as a tool to inspire participants' thoughts and memories, which can greatly enhance the quality of the narrative. This enhancement was evident during my visit with Beth. She did not discuss meaningful connections with specific students during the seated interview, but did so several times when we reached evocative locations during our mobile interview. Harris (2016) encouraged the expansion of this data collection technique in higher education research as it offers a unique way to explore the campus and individual experiences. Carpiano (2009) positioned that walking interviews are effective when paired with traditional seated interviews.

I utilized this data collection technique by requesting each participant to lead me on a tour of their campus grounds. The audio during this experience was also recorded using a digital recording device. The walking interview promoted further interaction between the participant and I and also provided opportunities for observation. Observations provide moments that unveil the unique complexity and a greater understanding of the case (Stake, 1995). Moreover, observations permitted a firsthand encounter that allowed me to make inferences about experiences beyond what was discussed during the stationary interview and also helped to provide additional context (Merriam, 2009; Maxwell, 2013; Patton, 2015). Brown and Durrheim (2009) noted that mobile interviews allow part of the interactions between the researcher and participant to be directed by the situation and space while on the move.

In preparation for the study, I thought forward and specifically chose that each participant would decide the route and contents of the tour to play an interactive role in the gathering of data (Brown & Durrheim, 2009; Reybold et al., 2013, p. 704). My authority as the researcher was minimized by distributing the power, which allowed each dean to exercise their local expertise around campus (Brown & Durrheim, 2009; Corbin & Morse, 2003; Kvale, 2006). Moreover, the construction of knowledge based on situational context, mobile interactivity, and shared power supported my epistemological framework (Brown & Durrheim, 2009; Harris 2016). Participants led me to places where they said they often have casual interactions with students. These locations were in dining sites, student lounges, and heavy-trafficked areas where students traveled in between classes.

In these settings, participants were often greeted by students who seemed eager to approach and interact with the dean and share in meaningful dialogue about recent campus events. The deans also casually approached other students, and not surprisingly, were able to initiate conversation using student names. As an observer, I noted that the students did not seem fazed by this activity, which led me to believe that seeing and interacting with the dean in an informal setting was certainly not an uncommon experience. The mobile interview provided a means to visualize each participant's social network in real space and time (Kusenbach, 2003). In addition to gathering supportive data through semi-structured mobile interview questions, the tour provided a greater understanding of the overall campus culture. Each mobile interview tour lasted between 25 and 55 minutes. Five of the six individuals participated in the mobile interview with the exception of Jill, the dean from Spring College. My communication with Jill and her executive assistant leading up to my visit stressed the importance of the campus tour in regards to my research design. I was informed that Jill was not able to take me on a tour of Spring College's campus as soon as I arrived to her office that day.

I capitalized on recording field notes during the tour regarding noteworthy exchanges with students. Observation of these meaningful interactions served as a window into the daily life of the dean and helped me better understand their relationships with students. The mobile interview allowed me to observe the participant to gain a clearer understanding of their style and level of comfort in terms of interactions with students. The campus tour provided first-hand observations regarding the dean's

experience in relation to Rogers's (1962) interpersonal relationship development and Altman and Taylor's (1973) Social Penetration Approach.

The dialogue of the mobile interviews was recorded with a digital recording device but not transcribed. The decision to not transcribe these recordings was made during the first pilot study site visit. The sporadic and inconsistent timing of the dialogue along with the participation of numerous passing community members factored into this decision. Alternatively, I decided to reflect on the mobile interview experience immediately after each site visit concluded. I went to an isolated location on or near campus to process these interactions by listening to the audio recording while I made additions to my corresponding field notes to incorporate any key interactions or statements that I might have missed while writing notations during the tour. This immediate action helped to increase the accuracy of my interpretations of the experience while it was fresh in my mind. The observations, corresponding field notes, and reflective memos were reviewed three times while simultaneously listening to the audio recording to pull apart patterns and support developing categories during the ongoing analysis (Stake, 1995).

One concern that arose from the mobile interview in my pilot study was the actual timing of the campus tour. The first campus tour with Ethel was in the late morning right before noon directly prior to the common lunch hour. During this tour there was a wealth of students making their way across campus or seated in lounges and dining areas. Marcy's stationary interview and tour took place later in the afternoon when there appeared to be less foot traffic and student activity in common areas. I intentionally tried

to schedule a timeline similar to my initial visit with Ethel, but this did not work out with Marcy's schedule. I was originally slated for a morning and early afternoon visit, but due to an unexpected change in Marcy's calendar, I was forced to reschedule a week later when she was only available in the afternoon.

Marcy noted during my visit that this time of the day was typically a period with less student activity. She was still able to connect with students, but some of these interactions seemed to be a bit forced. I believe that Marcy may have been going out of her way to engage with students for the sake of providing me with an opportunity for observation. Even so, Marcy's approach seemed natural and the students appeared to respond in a genuine manner. This led me to believe that even though the interactions may have been influenced by my mere presence as a researcher, the actual nature of Marcy engaging with students was commonplace. Therefore, I ultimately decided that these observations were legitimate and suitable for inclusion as data in my study.

As I coordinated additional meetings with participants, I made an intentional effort to schedule each visit during the morning to capitalize on peak social periods (Harris, 2016). I made it clear in advance that this timing was crucial for my specific research design. In relation to these scheduling concerns, I learned that it was vital to develop a relationship with the dean's administrative or executive assistant. I found that these influential staff members are the ones truly responsible for the dean's daily schedule. I was able to develop a positive rapport with these individuals over the phone when scheduling my visit to campus. I intentionally took the time to introduce myself and get to know them during that initial consultation. I believe this relationship

development helped not only for advanced scheduling purposes, but also aided in my preparation for the actual visit. I continued to be mindful of this dynamic as my study advanced with additional data collection.

Participant journal reflection exercises. Participants were asked to further explore their experiences through a reflective journal exercise that was emailed out after the site visit. Participants sent their responses back to me via email. The initial idea for this data collection activity arose during the debrief conversations with the two participants from my pilot study. Both deans expressed a willingness to take part in a written reflection in the future. They felt it could be useful for me as a researcher to provide them with prompts based on preliminary findings so they could write a brief journal reflection about key topic areas of my research. They believed this activity could provide valuable insight for me as a researcher, and also serve as a meaningful exercise for them and their current work with students. I was excited by this possibility and felt it spoke to the collaborative nature of my constructivist approach to knowledge production (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013; Glesne, 2011; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2015).

I finalized the content of the journal prompts after all site visits were completed along with the initial review and coding of the interview transcriptions. I believe this alternative form of data collection helped support my research questions and extended emergent emic perspectives. I coded their typed reflections in a similar fashion to the transcripts in an effort to support my overall understanding of the case to either corroborate emerging categories or to identify any discrepancies. The participant journal reflection prompts (Appendix D) were emailed to each dean towards the end of the fall

2017 semester after their site visit. I collected journal reflections from all six participants to utilize as supporting data for ongoing analysis.

Document and artifact review. Document review aligns with the other data gathering sources, but allows the researcher to explore activity that could not be observed directly (Stake, 1995). Documents were used to support my overall understanding of the case to corroborate emerging categories and to potentially identify any discrepancies. Documents such as campus maps, newspaper articles, professional biographies, and other online content acted as supporting documentation to provide additional context for the study. I accessed documents both prior to and after each site visit without any involvement from my participants, as this type of content was available to the general public on each institution's official website. Examination of this material proved to be useful prior to each visit. It allowed me to become more familiar with my participants' educational background and professional experiences. Throughout the study, participants themselves also shared additional documentation in advance of and following my visit to campus. Documents such as participants' curriculum vitae, staff organizational charts, mission statements, strategic initiatives, and other personal documents provided valuable context and perspective for each dean's institutional setting and student affairs approach.

I also reviewed artifacts that were discovered during my visit to each participant's office. As Charmaz (2006) stated "all are data" regarding the variety of sources during the interview and research process (p. 16). Common office items such as photographs, certificates of achievement and recognition, gifts from students, and other collectables not only provided rich understanding, but will also sparked conversation on unanticipated

meaningful matters (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013; Patton, 2015). I was able to take pictures of and ask insightful questions about office artifacts with the permission of my participants at each site visit. These conversations led to meaningful insight regarding previous connections with students and also contributed to further document review.

Researcher memos. Written and verbal memos served as a way, “to facilitate reflection and analytic insight” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 20). During the pilot study I recorded memos about my overall experience immediately following each site visit; I extended this technique for each subsequent site visit. This recap of experiences during interviews and observations allowed me to capitalize on recalling key aspects of the interaction in a timely fashion. The memo process permitted me to highlight major categories of each individual visit while building connections between the participants as the research project unfolded. These iterative reflective exercises became a ritualistic experience for me to synthesize raw data and lay a foundation for future interpretive analysis.

Written memos were typed out at each institution before I left the campus. My goal was to reflect on my initial impressions of the campus, the institution, the respective participant, and the interview and mobile tour experience. I purposefully chose to engage in these writing sessions in highly-active locations on campus, including student union buildings and dining facilities. This type of setting allowed me to make subtle observations to increase my familiarity with the environment and community members. These memo drafts served as a valuable resource for future analysis and aided in recalling my site visit experiences.

Verbal memos were recorded while traveling in the car after each visit. These memos enabled me to further process impressions and corresponding thoughts after each site visit. The alternative format allowed me to think and reflect in a different way, which unleashed a stream of consciousness. It provided me with a mode to revisit each site in my mind and access memories from those experiences. It helped me process what I experienced, my unfolding thoughts, and how I arrived at my current perspectives at that time. I was able to reflect on all the miles traveled, which enabled me to understand the participants and the places where they spend so much of their time. I felt privileged to be able to dive into the water that my participants swim in on a daily basis. These verbal accounts provided me with the opportunity to synthesize global connections that developed with each additional site visit. I was able to make quick comparisons of each college and participant, noting insightful similarities and differences.

All of the verbal memos took place while driving in my car from each campus back to my home. I regularly drove on the same major highways and routinely passed by previous research sites on my return. These moments of close physical proximity helped me recall key memories from prior visits while recording the verbal memos. Similar to the campus tours, the construction of knowledge based on situational context and mobile activity supported my epistemological framework (Brown & Durrheim, 2009). One specific reflection was also inspired by a meaningful song that played on my radio during the journey. The song lyrics reminded me of the qualitative research process and my constructivist approach. This influential reflective musical experience will be explained later in the data analysis section. During the verbal memo exercises, my previous lived

experiences resurfaced and situational stimuli influenced the knowledge creation process (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013; Glesne, 2011; Merriam, 2009).

Data Analysis

Data analysis in case study research allows the researcher to deconstruct a phenomenon and give new meaning to the parts that are important to the case itself (Stake, 1995). The new meaning for the case is created through direct interpretation of both individual instances and an aggregation of instances until categories emerge from the data (Stake, 1995). Data analysis led me to a clear explication and understanding, which would allow a subsequent reader to vicariously experience the case (Jones et al., 2014; Merriam, 2009).

Using a constructivist approach, I analyzed interview transcripts, observations, documents, and reflective exercises. Constructivism is situated in the natural world and linked to Piagetian psychology (Jones et al., 2013). By taking this stance, I believe that truth is relative and dependent on individual perspectives. This practice places value on the subjective creation of meaning. Throughout the interviews and exercises I helped participants access their memories in order to interpret and construct meaning. The interviews served as a cooperative effort to process the participant's thoughts and emotions along with providing an opportunity to reflect on their previous personal experiences with students (Enosh & Buchbinder, 2005). A constructivist epistemological approach "points out the unique experience in each of us" (Crotty, 1998, p. 58). My interpretations played a prominent role in the analysis of data. A study by Palmer, Davis, and Maramba (2011) positioned the scholars "to construct knowledge,

understanding, and meaning through human interactions” using a constructivist approach (p. 582). I was able to create a similar system of knowledge generation through purposeful engagement with each participant and deep reflection on all forms of the data.

Lyrical illumination. A noteworthy experience related to my constructivist approach occurred during one of my reflective verbal researcher memos. As I drove in my car after one of my last site visits, a personally-meaningful song played on the radio. I listened to this song countless times over the years, but this was the first time I made a connection between the lyrics and my research study. I rewound one particular segment and listened to it numerous times before completing the recorded memo. The lyrics helped me reflect on the interpretive process and the impact on my analysis, particularly as it relates to perspective as detailed previously in this chapter. My perspective influences my way of knowing and my ability to make sense of a complex phenomenon (Koro-Ljungberg, et al., 2009; Luttrell, 2010). The lyrics from Dave Matthews (2012, track 11) served as a metaphor for my qualitative approach towards analysis and interpretation, “through your window is one way to see the world, step outside and look back into, look and listen, you decide what to believe, so shine your light while you got one.”

People view the world through their own window; a personal lens. My previous lived experiences with my dean of students influenced my perspective. In this study, it was essential for me to also step outside and examine the phenomenon based my participants’ experiences. My site visits allowed me to look and listen through interviews, observations, document review, and participant journal reflections.

Throughout this multifaceted approach I was able to generate knowledge and create meaning cooperatively with my participants. The lyric ends with the line, “so shine your light while you got one.” In the verbal memo I reflected that to me, qualitative research is about illumination. Qualitative research can also be described as a way of exploring, digging, or mining, but I have always gravitated to thinking about it as a mode to illuminate. This research study is my opportunity to shine a light on something that I am so invested in, a subject that I care so much about, a phenomenon that I am dedicated to illuminate.

I enjoyed incorporating creative exercises in this process whenever possible. These activities allowed me to maintain a level of personal investment and more importantly, helped me create meaning. Listening to music and more specifically the interpretation of lyrics has always been an important part of my life. Stake (1995) positioned that case study data analysis permits the researcher to deconstruct and give new meaning through interpretation. The chance to weave my personal passion into my research through purposeful engagement and deep reflection on all forms of the data aided in the facilitation of knowledge generation and development of my perspective.

Constant comparative analysis. Constant comparative analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 1990) is an iterative process that allowed me to incorporate a series of coding techniques to explore my participants’ experiences. Merriam (2009) noted that constant comparative analysis is commonly used in a variety of qualitative studies and does not require the researcher to ultimately develop a substantive theory. The goal of constant comparative analysis is to identify patterns by comparing one segment of data with

another to illuminate similarities and differences (Merriam, 2009). I implemented a form of the constant comparative method in this intrinsic case study to better understand the experiences of deans of students without necessarily creating a new theory.

Constant comparative analysis required me to code the data collected from the first participant, which in turn advanced my approach with the next subsequent participant. The inductive comparative method delivers a systematic process for analyzing qualitative data (Merriam, 2009). This analysis process proved to be ideal during the pilot study and continued through the remainder of data collection. I focused not only on examining the content of what was shared during the conversations and observations, but also the manner in which participants expressed their thoughts, feelings, and experiences in order to craft meaning. The constant comparative method allowed me to be fully immersed in the data and proved to serve as a helpful approach to maintain discipline and productivity throughout the research process. This approach required me to keep up with transcriptions, listening sessions, and open coding before transitioning my attention to the next participant. I selected the constant comparative method because it not only allowed me to progressively refine my interview questions, it also increased my awareness of specific topics or key gateway phrases to explore with the next participant.

Coding. Codes are the notations made within the data that are relevant for answering research questions (Merriam, 2009). The stationary interview transcripts and participant journal reflections were coded for this research study. I reviewed each transcript line by line and made notations in the margins to help organize the unfolding

analysis. Codes are words or phrases that provide meaning and thus were the building blocks of knowledge generation in my study. Coding is the defining and rearranging of data to show relationships and develop theoretical categories (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Glesne, 2011; Maxwell, 2013). Assigning codes to pieces of data allowed for the construction of categories by grouping notes that go together (Merriam, 2009). The process of coding the interview data provided me with the opportunity to search for meaning in the comments made by each participant. By coding the data, I made interpretations that actively contributed to the unfolding analytic process (Merriam, 2009).

Like the approach of Adair and Pastori (2011) and Konopasky and Reybold (2015), personally designing the iterative coding framework provided both a meaningful and practical process for me to deeply connect with the data. As Adair and Pastori (2011) positioned, qualitative coding is a complex balance of both emic and etic perspectives, therefore coding should never be an isolated activity. I made an intentional effort to constantly revisit and immerse myself in the recordings, transcriptions, preliminary codes, and reflective memos to develop both emic and etic perspectives. Etic perspectives were derived from my self-imposed topical analysis linked to my research questions, whereas emic perspectives were driven from emergent analysis based on data provided directly from the participants (Adair & Pastori, 2011). The coding of data leads to a framework of relational categories (Glesne, 2011).

Open coding. Open coding was the first step in the analysis process in which I identified segments of data in the transcriptions that might be useful and relevant, thus

being open to any possibilities (Glesne, 2011; Merriam, 2009). Corbin and Strauss (1990) explained that actions, events, and interactions are compared to highlight similarities and differences, which are then grouped to eventually form categories and subcategories. During the pilot study, the initial open coding procedure, “identified emic, or participant-driven, concepts for further categorization” (Reybold, Brazer, Schrum, & Corda, 2012, p. 232). I underlined meaningful words or statements in the pilot study transcripts and then descriptive codes were written in the corresponding margin to illuminate emerging categories. This initial analysis provided me with a pathway to identify both unique and universal aspects of the dean of students experiences as data collection progressed. I continued this approach as data collection expanded with additional participants. I frequently used similar codes in an effort to establish consistency throughout all participants and the various forms of data. I created a master list of codes that eventually exceeded 100 codes. This master code list would be reorganized later in the analysis process.

Open coding provided me with the opportunity to carve out “meaning chunks” to understand the context and approach the deans used to connect with students (Halx & Reybold, 2005, p. 299). I further embraced the mindset of letting go and being open to a flow during the fluid, iterative process to transcend deeper into emic analysis (Luttrell, 2010). I liken this analytical approach to the experience of expertly trained jazz musicians that surrender to the flow of the creative music-making process. Iterative constant comparative analysis similarly operates within a structure while simultaneously

being open to the value of focused improvisation. Axial coding extended the analysis and allowed me to systematically organize the open codes into emergent categories.

Axial coding. Axial codes involve interpretation and reflection on meaning (Merriam, 2009). Jones et al. (2014) explained this as “the process of relating concepts to each other” (p. 165). This grouping process organizes open codes into categories that relate to one another (Glesne, 2011; Jones et al., 2014; Merriam, 2009). Axial coding allowed for the further development of interconnections between the emergent trends. It is essential to understand that categories are interpretations constructed from the data, they are “not the data themselves” (Merriam, 2009, p. 181). Corbin and Strauss (1990) implemented axial coding to link subcategories to categories by analyzing conditions, context, strategies (actions/interaction), and consequences. I refined the initial master code list by eliminating duplicate codes, renaming certain codes based on the iterative collection of data and constant comparative analysis, and merging codes from related topic areas. The master list was synthesized down to a coherent group of 61 codes. These 61 codes were then organized into 18 subcategories that formed a larger narrative of my participants’ experiences. The 18 subcategories were ultimately grouped under four main categorical findings. I highlighted codes and subcategories from each respective category using a different color for each grouping. This visual representation allowed me to easily locate and identify categorical information during the analytic and writing process. Throughout the axial coding process, I massaged out categories from the collection of data, which made the emerging analysis coherent (Charmaz, 2006; Denzin & Lincoln, 2013; Patton, 2015).

I was able to describe associations between the open codes, subcategories, and categories that provided me with a greater understanding of the process and context of how deans were able to develop meaningful and sustained connections with students. The axial coding process enabled me to conceptualize my participants' own words into co-constructed knowledge. The emergent insight allowed me to weave subcategories together and uncover relationships to connect etic perspectives that related back to my overarching research questions. The process of connecting related ideas allowed me to illuminate a clearer understanding of the complex phenomenon of being a dean and their experiences with students. Meaning can be produced through a search for patterns, and Stake (1995) defined correspondence as consistency within certain conditions. As I worked to comprehend the case, I did so with a sense of correspondence by understanding the behavior, issues, and contexts of my particular case (Stake, 1995).

Quality and Trustworthiness

In empirical research studies, the term validity is frequently used to evaluate quality and is often associated with concepts of strength, power, and effectiveness (Cho & Trent, 2006; Polkinghorne, 2007). Polkinghorne (2007) extended that validity defines acceptable evidence and appropriate analysis. The incorporation of validity in qualitative research is closely tied to knowledge produced in relation to the constructed reality of the participant and researcher (Cho & Trent, 2006). Many noteworthy qualitative scholars shy away from the explicit use of the term validity to describe the effectiveness of their research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013; Glesne, 2011; Luttrell, 2010; Maxwell, 2013; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2015). Alternatively, terms such as authenticity, goodness,

quality, and trustworthiness are used to determine the correctness of the research approach and associated interpretations (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002; Harrison, MacGibbon & Morton, 2001; Maxwell, 2013). The terms quality and trustworthiness resonated with me as I prepared to explore the experiences of deans of students.

As a qualitative researcher I considered my positionality, bias, and design limitations; all of which can impact subsequent data collection and research findings. Reactivity is the concept that states the researcher can influence the knowledge generated from participants (Maxwell, 2013). Maxwell (2013) contended that such influence is impossible to eliminate, and rather the focus is to better understand it and use it productively to enhance the overall quality and trustworthiness. Like Patton (2015) and Keybold et al. (2012, p. 232) my epistemological approach centered on how the relationship of the researcher and the researched contributed to the transparency of my methodology. I believe there was limited “distance” between me as the researcher and my participants throughout the collection of data (L.E. Keybold, personal communication, November 28, 2016). The participants often made key assertions that were preceded or followed by validation statements such as, “you know how it is when this happens with a student.” My familiarity with their profession and environment decreased the distance between us, which I believe consequently improved the quality of the study. I was constantly mindful to always keep my assumptions in check through theoretical sensitivity (Corbin & Strauss, 1990) by returning to the data and my memos for increased clarity. The process of making constant comparisons and challenging

categories allowed me to, “break through subjectivity and bias” (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 13).

This study incorporated multiple data sources and collection techniques as a way to triangulate my data to increase quality and trustworthiness (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013; Patton, 2015). I implemented multiple methods through interviews, observations, reflective exercises, and document review, along with ruling out alternate explanations. I extended my efforts to include member checks with participants and peer review (Jones et al., 2014; Maxwell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). I integrated these additional measures as I extended this study to support increasingly robust findings.

The member check process of taking developing interpretations back to participants and soliciting their feedback helped to minimize misconceptions, clarified perspectives, and uncovered any researcher biases and misunderstandings of observations (Maxwell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). I was able to conduct valuable member checks with all of the participants in this study. Member checks took place through audio recorded telephone conversations after initial analysis concluded. I shared the initial categorical findings along with details about subcategories with each participant and solicited their reactions and feedback. All participants expressed an immediate sense of harmony and agreed that my findings aligned with their own personal experiences as deans of students. Participants made the following statements in reference to my findings, “everything makes perfect sense,” “everything is on target,” “it all resonates and nothing contradicts my experiences,” and, “I am not at all surprised with your findings.” The participants also shared additional reflections and provided examples that further contributed to my

data collection and iterative analysis. The member check process was insightful for my research findings and also reinforced the overall quality and trustworthiness of my study.

I utilized a peer reviewer to examine my analysis process and to offer additional reflective insight on my categorical findings (Glesne, 2011; Merriam, 2009). The peer reviewer was a professional colleague and a fellow member of the same doctoral program. This individual had already earned their doctorate and completed their own qualitative case study dissertation research project prior to their involvement as a peer reviewer in my study. The peer reviewer's familiarity with the subject material and the qualitative case study research process positively contributed to the quality and trustworthiness of this study. That individual offered suggestions regarding word choice and compelled me to continually examine my activity as the primary researcher. The utilization of a peer reviewer helped me to minimize researcher bias or misrepresentation of the data and categorical findings.

Combining these triangulation techniques helped me better understand who I am in relation to the reality I wish to uncover (L.E. Reybold, personal communication, November 28, 2016). Triangulation is a process implemented to contribute to the quality and trustworthiness of findings in constructivist studies and incorporates the multiple perspectives of qualitative research (Glesne, 2011; Jones et al., 2014; Merriam, 2009). Denzin (1978) proposed four means of triangulation: the use of multiple methods, multiple sources of data, multiple investigators, or multiple theories. I implemented triangulation through the use of multiple methods, multiple sources of data, member-checking, and peer review in my study.

A metaphor that is brewing. Anfara, Brown, and Mangione (2002) discussed the qualitative researcher's approach to quality and trustworthiness as both the art of science and the science of art in response to challenges from the positivist community. The scholars' analogy of such an approach reminded me of a similar philosophical debate commonly present in the community of beer brewers. As an active member of the brewer's guild, I used quality assurances in the brewing process as a metaphor to better interpret qualitative approaches. The controversy of brewing as both an art and a science runs rampant in the brewing community. Regardless of a brewer's training and philosophy, similar quality assurances are adopted to produce a consistent and palatable pint of ale. Brewers fervently employ sound methods in this craft to ensure a quality product for consumers. Anfara et al. (2002) similarly highlighted strategies that qualitative researchers use to clearly communicate the credibility, confirmability, dependability, and transferability of their research for readers and the scholarly community at large.

The strict use of tried and tested brewing equipment and related instruments developed over a period of hundreds of years speaks to the credibility of the brewing process and product. The same can be said for the qualitative researcher who serves as the interpretive research instrument in the study. It is vital to have prolonged engagement with research participants in the field. Brewers are notorious for their attention to ensuring sanitary conditions to protect against unwanted bacteria that can spoil beer. These steps towards cleanliness promote a dependable product. In similar fashion, researchers focus on dependability when selecting appropriate coding and analysis

strategies for their data. Brewers initially craft several small pilot batches to refine a new recipe and help determine which ingredients to select in order to balance the sweet malty notes and bitterness of the hops. They plan for the pleasing characteristics of the pilot batch of beer to transfer to large-scale production. The same can be said for researchers who employ purposeful sampling and engage in their own pilot studies to refine their approach and increase the transferability of findings. Brewers typically entrust other expert brewers or certified judges to evaluate their product and critique it in terms of consistency to the strict guidelines of a particular beer style. They also solicit feedback directly from consumers. In similar fashion, researchers utilize multiple data sources, multiple collection methods, and peer review along with member checks to ensure confirmability.

Qualitative researchers must be mindful of quality and trustworthiness throughout the entire research design process. The brewer is cognizant of how the mash temperature influences sugar extraction, which in turn determines how the chosen yeast strain impacts attenuation and flocculation during to fermentation. In the same vein, the qualitative researcher must consider positionality, bias, and design limitations; all of which impact subsequent data collection and research findings. Reactivity describes how the researcher can influence the knowledge generated from participants (Maxwell, 2013). Maxwell (2013) contended that such influence is impossible to eliminate, and rather the focus is to better understand it and use it productively to enhance the overall quality and trustworthiness of the study.

The brewer and the qualitative researcher both cull together a combination of sound techniques, extended engagement, and their own philosophy into each product of their craft. This intentional effort effectively balances each of these influences to improve the quality and trustworthiness of their efforts. A brewer whose palatable beer brings the imbiber back for another pint of ale every Friday evening is liken to a qualitative researcher whose explorations continually draw the interest of their peers in the scholarly community.

Ethical Considerations

My subjectivity was brought into focus during the pilot study analysis and prompted me to understand how and in which ways this heightened self-awareness could have influenced this study. It would be difficult for me to take a completely neutral stance as I approached this research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). Each individual embodies their own perspective based on previously lived experiences. The acknowledgement of my propensity towards subjectivity frames the generation of knowledge in this study (Maxwell, 2013). I was unable to completely remove the self from what was previously known.

My unique frame of reference mattered in this study. Maxwell (2013) extended that if I attempted to isolate myself from my own subjective experiences, I would eliminate valuable sources of insight that would ultimately have a negative effect on quality. The analysis of data in this study relied on the interpretation and construction of reality and knowledge in collaboration with the researcher's own checked subjectivity. I maintained a sense of integrity and made conscious ethical decisions to minimize the

negative impact of bias. Throughout the study, I made a concerted effort to consider evidence in the data that not only supported my own opinions, but also those of my participants that may be different from my own. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) distinguished between biased subjectivity, meaning only incorporating data that would support the researcher's own opinion; and perspectival subjectivity, which adopts various perspectives that result in different interpretations of meaning. Moreover, the latter would ultimately lead to a greater understanding and overall higher levels of quality and trustworthiness of my analysis (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Through the employment of perspectival subjectivity, the voice of each participant was clearly heard in my interpretations.

I constantly explored my subjectivity by acknowledging my orientation as the researcher in this study (Glesne, 2011). Moreover, it was essential to set aside time to memo about the subject matter both prior to and after my interviews and observations throughout the study. This deliberate reflection process allowed me to be mindful of pre-conceived notions to remind me of my biases (Glesne, 2011). Maxwell's (2013) researcher identity memo is a reflective exercise that encourages the researcher to consider their goals and personal identity and how the two could potentially impact the study. The employment of Maxwell's (2013) researcher identity memo continually allowed me to reflect on my goals and the associated assumptions I possessed based on my previous experiential knowledge.

Boundaries and Limitations

The pilot study served as an incredibly valuable practice for my unfolding research and I considered it a true learning experience for me as an emerging scholar. The pilot study allowed me to consider unanticipated factors that could impact the outcome of my study. The boundaries of my study were factored into my research design. I adjusted those boundaries following the pilot study to increase my participant pool. I expanded my boundary from only the Memorial Conference to include the Monument Conference. I did so in an effort to learn from additional deans of students. I felt that engaging with more deans would help me better understand a more diverse array of experiences. My hope was that by interacting with additional deans, I would be more likely to reach a desired level of repetition and congruence in my data. This saturation would strengthen my findings. I was able to secure six out of the 10 eligible deans who fit my selection criteria as participants. Although the four other deans said they were honored to be asked, they ultimately declined my invitation. They each expressed that their demanding schedules and increased responsibilities prevented them from being able to participate. The boundaries of this study are not a limitation, rather they provide the scope of this inquiry.

A limitation of this study would be the makeup of my participant pool. The theoretical perspective and design of this study did not intend to investigate participants from a particular class such as age, gender, race, sexual orientation, or any other form of identity. The focus was to explore the experiences of deans of students with a minimum of five years of service at their respective small, private, liberal arts colleges. The group

of participants were all White and referenced their opposite-gender spouses or partners. Bryan was the only male participant in the group. A more diverse participant pool could have contributed to a wider array of personal and professional experiences. Since I selected participants based on criteria, the group was a sample. A more diverse group may have highlighted extreme examples within the case.

I believe it is worth mentioning that all participants in this study essentially fulfilled the responsibilities of both the dean of students and the vice president, and all but Jill formally held both titles. Given the evolving nature of the field of student affairs coupled with the increased demands of senior student affairs officers, their dualistic roles impacted their ability to connect with students on some level. It is possible that securing participants who only served in the dean of students role could lead to slightly different findings. A study including only participants holding just the dean of student title at small, private, liberal arts colleges could be worthy of consideration for future research.

The final limitation relates to the mobile interview campus tour. These opportunities allowed me to observe the participant moving around their home campus and interacting with community members. Jill was the only participant who did not participate in the mobile interview. I feel that I missed out on an insightful observation opportunity, especially given some of the topics and personal experiences Jill referenced in her stationary interview. Too, the actual timing of this experiential activity was crucial in capitalizing on the opportunity to capture meaningful observations (Brown & Durrheim, 2009; Harris, 2016).

Ethel was my first participant and her tour occurred at the ideal time in the late morning when campus was bustling and there was ample opportunity for natural student interaction. My trip to see Marcy was the final site visit of my pilot study. Her tour took place in the late afternoon, which she explained was a slow time on campus with most students either in class or tucked away in their residential rooms. I felt that some of Marcy's student interactions were forced. I made the intentional decision to schedule all of the remaining site visits in the early morning and negotiated a late morning mobile interview. I was mindful of timing and the anticipated level of student activity on each campus. It would have been ideal to observe Marcy at a same time of day and during a similar activity level on campus.

Despite the limitations detailed above, this study illuminated rich knowledge regarding the experiences of deans of students at small, private, liberal arts colleges and the connections they develop with students. Future scholars could consider these factors when designing their own research studies. The categorical findings of my research study are presented in the following chapter.

Chapter Four

My study explored the experiences of deans of students at small, private, liberal arts colleges. I sought to understand how deans develop meaningful and sustained connections with undergraduate students. The benefit of those connections to both students and the institution was also investigated. I utilized an intrinsic, single case, multisite case study approach to illuminate a better understanding of the phenomenon. In this chapter I share findings from my study that answer the following research questions:

- 1- How and under what context does a dean of students develop meaningful and sustained connections with undergraduate students at a small, private, liberal arts college?
- 2- What are the benefits of the meaningful and sustained connections between deans of students and undergraduate students? What are the benefits to the institution? What are the benefits to students?

I begin the chapter with descriptive profiles for each dean of students. I then share categorical findings that report across participants. I highlight categories in four broad areas: personal history, institutional factors, attributes and characteristics, and intentionally developed connections. I also call attention to specific instances noting similarities and differences amongst participants along with exemplary models. The chapter concludes with a summary of findings.

Dean of Students Profiles

The following section provides an overview of each of the six participants in this case study (Appendix E). Various aspects of their personal and professional life including their education, family, and professional history are incorporated to help the reader become more familiar with each individual. The participants' recollections of their dean of students at their undergraduate institution is also revealed. In most cases, these memories and more importantly, the corresponding connections provide context to each participant's journey. At the conclusion of each description I ascribed a unique persona to paint a narrative picture of each individual dean. These projections of personality are based on a combination of the information each participant shared coupled with my epistemic interpretations.

Ethel from Adams College. Ethel is currently serving in her 26th year as Dean of Students at Adams College. Later in her career, approximately nine years ago, she was appointed the Vice President for College Life. She concurrently holds both the Dean of Students and Vice President titles along with the associated responsibilities of the two positions. She spent the entirety of her professional career in higher education at Adams College. Ethel also worked as an instructor for various leadership and first-year seminar courses, and she led several international service learning trips with Adams College students. She served as a student affairs consultant and on accreditation teams at various institutions across the country. Ethel currently serves as a board member for several local community organizations. She is married with adult children.

Ethel grew up in central Pennsylvania. As an undergraduate student, Ethel attended a small, private, liberal arts college in the Midwest region of the United States and received a Bachelor of Arts in History. Ethel noted it was ironic that she was not involved in campus life as an undergraduate student, rather she spent all of her time focused on academics. She was able to recall the name of her Dean of Students during her college years and simply described her as a kind person. Ethel did not have a close relationship with that individual, and only recalled one casual interaction during her time as a student. She spoke fondly of her undergraduate experience and shared that she fell in love with higher education and the small college environment. Her early aspirations were to become a college professor, which led her to initially enroll in a graduate history program after completing her undergraduate degree. Ethel experienced a change of heart and took a job opportunity to return to a small college. She spent ten years working as the Executive Assistant to the President of Adams College before being appointed as the Dean of Students. Ethel later earned a Master of Science in Organizational Development followed by a doctorate in Higher Education Management.

The Mayor. I ascribed the persona of the Mayor to Ethel based on her personality and demeanor. According to *Online Etymology Dictionary* a mayor is an appointed head of a community, with connotations of being great and large. Ethel exuded a calming presence and enthusiastically welcomed me to her campus. Ethel shared that Adams College is a huge part of her identity. She truly cares for the college and the students, having spent most of her adult life, a total of 37 years, serving that one institution. Throughout my visit and campus tour, she warmly greeted countless faculty, staff, and

students. Everyone seemed to not only know that she was the Dean of Students, but also appeared to be familiar with her on a personal level. Most people were genuinely comfortable interacting with her, regardless of their status or affiliation. It appeared perfectly ordinary and natural for her to casually engage with community members around campus. Ethel clearly and accurately embodied the role of a mayor at Adams College with her friendly demeanor and strong community network.

Marcy from Fox College. Marcy is currently serving in her 21st year as Dean of Students at Fox College. Approximately eight years ago she was appointed the Vice President of Student Affairs. She simultaneously holds the Dean of Students title with related responsibilities. She spent the entirety of her professional career in higher education at Fox College. Marcy spent one year as the Interim Dean of Students before being selected as an internal applicant during a national search. Previously, she served seven years as Fox College's Assistant Dean, directly overseeing the institution's Residence Life program. Marcy is married with three children and lives within walking distance of the campus, just a few blocks away in a house owned by the college. All three of Marcy's children graduated from Fox College while she served in her senior leadership positions. The duality of being a mother and serving as the Dean of Students for her children was a unique and noteworthy experience for her.

Marcy was raised in Ohio and did not travel far from home when she enrolled in a small, private, liberal arts college in her native state. She earned a Bachelor of Arts in Music and was highly involved as an undergraduate student. Marcy was an active member of what she made explicitly clear to be a bacchanalian sorority. Ironically, she

also worked as a resident assistant, which allowed her to develop relationships with various student affairs staff. The undergraduate paraprofessional position exposed her to the college's holistic developmental approach and crisis response training, which provided a strong foundation for her career. Upon completion of her undergraduate degree, she was asked stay on staff as a Resident Director. This appointment gave her the opportunity to complete a Master's degree in Educational Policy and Leadership at the nearby state flagship research university.

Marcy shared fond memories of her Dean of Students while in college. She described him as an amazing man who transitioned from the academic faculty ranks to the administrative dean position. Through her recollections, Marcy painted an illustrative image of an individual she quipped as a model Dean of Students for the time; a kind and conspicuous Renaissance man who talked to everyone and smoked a tobacco pipe in a tweed jacket. Her commentary harmoniously alluded to the depictions of the earliest deans of men as chronicled by Schwartz (2010). Marcy's Dean of Students served as a role model and he was even the person who offered her first job opportunity after completing her undergraduate degree.

The Celebrity. I ascribed the persona of the Celebrity to Marcy based on her vibrant and appealing personality. According to *Online Etymology Dictionary* a celebrity is famous person who is well-attended and often celebrated by others. Marcy receives frequent requests to make appearances or deliver public presentations to parents and key stakeholders due to her dynamic disposition. She is the type of person who can make an immediate connection with anyone she meets. Marcy described herself as charismatic,

entertaining, and relatable. She alluded to her celebrity status on campus without being pretentious. Throughout our time together and especially during the tour, her favorable reputation with students and community members was evident. Marcy spoke consistently about her sincere commitment to being both approachable and relatable to students in order to assist in their personal development. After 21 years of service, she is unequivocally dedicated to the Fox College community and rightfully deserving of her celebrity status.

Beth from Hill College. Beth is currently serving in her 11th year as Dean of Students at Hill College. She was hired to serve in both the Dean of Students and Vice President of Student Affairs positions. Beth spent almost her entire career working at small, private, liberal arts colleges. Prior to her arrival at Hill College, she served as Dean of Students and Vice President at three other small colleges. Her professional journey took her from the Midwest to institutions in the South before settling into her current Mid-Atlantic home. Beth lives by herself in a large house owned by the college, which is located just across the street from the main entrance to campus. Beth never married, nor does she have any children. She did speak openly about her long-term partner. They have a long-distance relationship, as he lives in Chicago. The two often take turns traveling to visit each other every few weeks. Beth shared that she is comfortable with their relationship, as her career has always been her top priority. She even reflected about essentially being married to her profession.

Beth grew up in a medium-sized town in southern Illinois. She was raised by a loving family and as she described, it was a low-income home. She was a first-

generation college student, but going to college was an expectation that she and her parents always had in mind. Unlike many of her peers growing up, it was important for Beth to leave her hometown for a new experience. She moved away to a small, private, liberal arts college in her home state. She portrayed her college as a high-end institution, with the population primarily made up of wealthy students from the Chicago area. Beth enjoyed being thrust into what she called a preppy atmosphere, as it was everything that she imagined for her college experience.

Beth described her time in college as a phenomenal experience, filled with plenty of drinking and revelry. In fact, one of the earliest memories of her Dean of Students stemmed from a disciplinary meeting regarding a prank. Beth described him as a kind, older man, which she felt was typical for that time in the 1970s. He shared his belief that she was wasting her potential, which resulted in her deciding to become a resident assistant. Beth described this as her entry into the world of higher education and student affairs. Her student involvement led to enrollment in a student affairs Master's program at a large state institution, where she continued her work in residence life. After leaving that university, she moved into a senior administrative role and returned to the small, liberal arts college setting.

The Executive. I ascribed the persona of the Executive to Beth based on the commitment to her professional career and her deep focus on strategic initiatives. According to *Online Etymology Dictionary* an executive has roots in accomplishment and execution of tasks. Additionally, the term also relates to high rank and an adjectival sense of style and luxury. Beth spoke at length about always being visionary and her

responsibility to plan for the college's long-term future. She felt that this mindset often separated her from the daily activities and interactions with students. In spite of these strategic responsibilities, Beth made it clear that she makes an intentional effort to maintain connection with students. Beth appeared to be particularly invested in mentoring young female students, particularly those from underrepresented populations. Beth was sharply dressed and I was left with the impression that her outward appearance played into her executive persona. She blended the characteristics of style and relatability when she shared her tradition of frequently visiting a local nail salon with one of her female student mentees. Informal interactions such as this helped her forge strong bonds with students, while maintaining a professional mentoring relationship.

Bryan from Laurel College. Bryan is currently serving in his sixth year as Dean of Students at Laurel College. He was hired to serve in both the Dean of Students and Vice President of Student Affairs positions. He also teaches graduate courses in Higher Education Administration at a local public historically black university. Bryan spent most of his life in the South before taking on the chief student affairs role at Laurel College. Bryan began his professional career at a large state flagship research university. His most recent stint prior to Laurel College was serving as the Dean of Students at a smaller, private regional university. Bryan lives several miles away from campus with his wife, four children, and their Basset Hound. Bryan spoke at length about the importance of his family and how he always makes it a priority to spend time with them regardless of how hectic his schedule is at work. He often has his children join him on campus, especially for evening programs and weekend events. Bryan reflected on how

he felt that it is important for Laurel College students to not only see, but also understand that he is a family man. He believes that having his family visible can positively influence his efforts on campus as the Dean of Students.

Bryan was raised in a homogenous, small, rural town in North Carolina. He traveled to Memphis to earn his undergraduate degree in Psychology at a prestigious, small, private, liberal arts college. Bryan described having a transformative experience by immersing himself in the liberal arts as a student. He spoke in detail about the benefit of working closely with his peers and faculty members in this intimate environment both inside and outside the classroom. His initial interest in student affairs was inspired by his service as a resident assistant along with his involvement as a fraternity member, orientation leader, and tour guide. He was also heavily involved as a member of the Honor Council, eventually being elected to serve as the president during his senior year. Bryan furthered his education and earned Master's and doctoral degrees in Higher Education Administration.

Bryan recalls having two Deans of Student during his college career. The first was a male who he described as an advocate with a strong visible presence on campus. The second was a female who was hired after the first dean left to work at another prominent liberal arts college. Bryan described the latter as an approachable, genuine, and caring individual. He remains close to both of his deans to this day and considers them personal and professional mentors. Bryan recalls memories of the female dean always being on campus and frequently working late into the night. He respected her dedication, but cites those memories as motivation for him to maintain a healthy level of

work-life balance. Bryan makes it a point to instill the same expectation for his staff members.

The Everyday Family Man. I ascribed the persona of the Everyday Family Man to Bryan based on his casual attitude and commitment to his family. According to *Online Etymology Dictionary* the phrase everyday is rooted in “being worn on ordinary days” and “to be met with every day, common.” Bryan’s subtle southern drawl lends to his calming and hospitable presence. He frequently dresses in more casual business attire as it is not only encouraged by his President, but also allows him to appear more approachable to students. Bryan also developed a program called the Mobile Dean, which positions him in heavily trafficked areas around campus several times throughout the week. This program enables him to have routine and informal interactions with students. His overall approach speaks to the etymology of the first part of his persona.

The *Online Etymology Dictionary* roots the word family with domestic and service connotations. Family also relates to a collective body of people with common distinguishing characteristics. The word man is rooted in being humane and is associated with kindness and civility. Bryan wants the campus community to see him as a father who is dedicated to his family. In a similar way he is committed to the college and cares deeply for the welfare of the students. There is a shared passion for the liberal arts experience that permeates the Laurel College campus. Bryan met his wife while they attended the same small college. She understands the liberal arts college environment and the impact of his position. Bryan explained he and his wife have a shared mission, which they view as a joint venture given the lifestyle that his job requires.

Rebecca from North College. Rebecca is currently serving in her 10th year as Dean of Students at North College. Approximately five years ago, she was appointed the Vice President for Student Affairs. She still concurrently maintains the Dean of Students title with associated responsibilities. Rebecca worked at smaller, private institutions for the entirety of her career. She began her vocation working in residence life at her alma mater. After earning two advanced degrees, she moved to a small, liberal arts college in the South to serve as an Associate Dean of Students for Campus Life before assuming the helm at North College. Rebecca just recently married later in her adult life and now lives with her husband 20 miles away from campus. She previously always lived either on or very near to campus, so the separation of her new home is a new experience for Rebecca. She had to receive permission to live more than five miles away from campus given her role.

Rebecca was raised as an only child in central Pennsylvania and was a first-generation college student. She stayed in her hometown to pursue an undergraduate degree at the nearby prestigious liberal arts college. As an English major and student athlete, Rebecca's original plan was to pursue a career as a high school teacher and varsity coach. During her senior year, Rebecca realized she could turn her student leader experience into a profession in a different educational setting. After graduation, she transitioned from being a resident assistant to a full-time professional staff member in the resident life department. She advanced positions within the department and went on to earn her Master's degree in education from the same institution. Rebecca then transitioned back to being a full-time student and moved away from her hometown to

complete a doctoral degree in Higher Education Administration at a prominent public research university.

Being from a small town where everyone knew each other, Rebecca actually grew up knowing the man who would eventually serve as her Dean of Students. Her father was friends with the dean and they often went golfing together on Sundays. As a college student she remembers going to his house for summer barbecues during resident assistant training. She developed a close professional relationship with him as a young professional. Rebecca described him as always being accessible and visible on campus. He would frequent athletics events and other community gatherings. Even though he oversaw the student conduct process, Rebecca explained that students still found him approachable. She reflected that level of approachability as being the most profound influence on her own career as Dean of Students. Rebecca spoke to the importance of always being present for students because it is impossible for her to know when being somewhere is going to matter. She explained that some of her most meaningful interactions with students occurred at times when she least expected it to be that way.

The Campus Mom. I ascribed the persona of the Campus Mom to Rebecca based on her dedication to the institution and the philosophical approach to her role as the Dean of Students. According to *Online Etymology Dictionary* the word campus describes the grounds of a college and mom is a shortened, informal version of mother. Rebecca spoke repeatedly during my time with her about making an intentional effort to connect with as many students as possible each day. Her daily outfit consists of a North College student organization or athletic team t-shirt proudly peeking out from under a blazer. She tries to

highlight a different student group through her clothing based on their upcoming events or philanthropic efforts. During my visit, her men's basketball shirt helped market the team's first home game of the season the following day. She spoke about how her wardrobe selection has essentially become a friendly competition amongst the student body. Rebecca explained that her casual dress helps establish initial personal contact, which often leads to more meaningful connections with students.

Rebecca routinely abandons her office in the student affairs building in favor of working on her laptop in various locations around the student union building. She utilizes this mobile approach to engage the students where they are and make the campus her home. At one point during our interview, Rebecca even described herself as a campus mom for North College. Rebecca's self-selected metaphorical comparison was harmonious with my initial impression of her identity as part of that community. This congruence of symbolism demonstrates the shared experience and co-construction of meaning creation in qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013; Glesne, 2011; Merriam, 2009, Patton, 2015). Rebecca does not have any biological children of her own, but it is obvious that she embodies the persona of a mother on campus for North College students.

Jill from Spring College. Jill is currently serving in her fifth year as Dean of the College at Spring College. She was hired to serve in this leadership role after spending 16 years at a small, private, liberal arts college in New England. During her tenure at that institution, Jill progressively took on elevated responsibilities, eventually reaching the Senior Associate Dean of Student Affairs position. Jill worked in a variety of educational

settings prior to her career at small colleges. The seven years after she graduated from college were spent working in international education, with the first four of those years having lived in Asia. She then taught high school level history and directed summer enrichment programs for three years. Jill is married and lives with her husband and their two children in a house two blocks from campus. She chose to reside close to campus in the urban neighborhood because she wanted her children to live in a diverse community. Jill enjoys the proximity to campus as she attends many campus activities, especially athletic events. She shared that exercise is her passion and self-identified as a triathlete.

Jill was raised in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. She moved away from her home state, but remained on the East Coast to enroll in one of the country's most elite Ivy League schools. Jill earned her undergraduate degree in Art History and eventually completed a Master's degree in education from another prestigious Ivy League school. She was highly involved in student government as an undergraduate, eventually being elected to serve as the senior class president. She revealed that the student leadership position along with her close connections to administrators in the dean's office prompted her to consider a career in higher education. At the time she envisioned that one day she might serve as a dean of students.

She recalled her dean of students as a thoughtful and reserved man who rose from the faculty ranks. They did not have a particularly close relationship and she described him as cerebral and formal, primarily focused on policy. Jill formed an influential bond with her Associate Dean, an approachable and smart woman. Jill sought out a female mentor, someone who successfully balanced the responsibilities of being a mother and a

professional. She now encourages her staff to find that same equilibrium. It is important for Jill and her colleagues to have their families engaged in the campus community.

The Athlete. I ascribed the persona of the Athlete to Jill based on her passion for personal fitness, commitment to campus athletics, and symbolically to represent her most challenging professional experiences as Dean of the College at Spring College. Jill's office is decorated with a wealth of medals and trophies from her successful triathlons. She spoke openly about her desire to maintain a healthy and active lifestyle. Jill also mentioned on several occasions that she utilizes campus athletic games as a way to establish visibility and sustain personal connections with both student athletes and the general student population at large. I casually spoke with several students during my campus visit and asked for their impression of the Dean of the College. Each of these conversations included a mention of Jill either being seen exercising on campus or her routine attendance at athletic competitions.

According to *Online Etymology Dictionary* the word athlete in both Latin and Greek signified a wrestler or combatant in public games. I feel this is a symbolic representation of Jill's often times public battles with both the fraternal organizations and even a group of prominent male faculty members. Jill honestly and openly discussed her struggles with members of the Greek life community when she first arrived at Spring College. She shared that many of these organizations believed her goal was to eradicate fraternities and as a result, both current students and alumni provided her with many challenging situations. Jill reflected that she was simply trying to uphold the code of student conduct in an effort to improve campus safety.

Jill also reflected on several occasions about a group of established male faculty members who continually publically challenged her professional judgement and decisions at various campus forums. She lamented that these interactions made her feel disrespected as a professional and even more so as a female administrator. Jill felt that she was consistently contested as a leader simply because of her gender. I ascribed the persona of “The Athlete” to Jill not only due to her fitness activity and affinity for campus athletics, but more importantly for her mental fortitude to stand up and combat troublesome fraternities and male chauvinistic faculty members.

Categorical Findings

Each participant in this study has their own unique identity and life history. After examination of the data I uncovered noteworthy categorical findings that cut across all or most of the participants. Rather than presenting findings from each individual person, I decided to primarily report across all participants as a way to synthesize the findings into a coherent account. Each category encompasses a foundation of multiple subcategories that were massaged out through the iterative coding and analysis process. These categorical findings will help readers identify with the participants and understand how and under what context deans of students at small, private liberal arts colleges develop meaningful and sustained connections with undergraduate students. I believe this knowledge will contribute to higher education research and influence the practice of new or aspiring deans of students who are interested in pursuing careers at small, private, liberal arts colleges.

In the following sections I highlight categories in four broad areas. The first two categories provide contextual insight regarding personal experience and current institutional influence, while the third and fourth speak to how deans are able to develop meaningful and sustained connections. First, I connect the influence of participants' personal history, specifically related to their pedigree as graduates of small, private, liberal arts colleges, previous meaningful connections with their deans, and their own involvement as undergraduate student leaders. The second category uncovers institutional factors that impact their actions, which include the influence of the President and their leadership cabinet along with the duality of the vice president and dean of students roles. The third category illuminates significant personal attributes and characteristics that contribute to the ability to develop meaningful connections with the student population at large. The fourth and final category highlights intentionally developed connections that deans nurture with specific student leaders, organizations, and populations.

Personal history. The first category that emerged illuminates the influence of participants' previous personal history on their professional experiences as deans of students. It was crucial for me to intentionally explore who they were in order to understand the person they have become in the present. Uncovering their personal journey provided a window for interpretation. The category provides context to better understand critical personal experiences that helped shape each individual over time and at influential moments in their earlier life. These instances occurred when participants were in the midst of their own personal development as college students. These

watershed moments are particularly fascinating as they illuminate poignant experiences of late adolescence and the transition into early adulthood. This was a time when participants were not only navigating their own evolving identity, but also who they wanted to become professionally along with their future career aspirations. Participants were aware that these experiences contributed to their personal development and could articulate the influence on their professional outlook. Three subcategories were uncovered that relate to their personal history. First, their lineage as college graduates of small, private, liberal arts colleges is described. Next, their previous meaningful connections with their own deans of students as undergraduates is brought to light. Finally, their own academic and extracurricular engagement along with student leadership experiences is highlighted.

Pedigree and pull toward the liberal arts mission. A previous history with the liberal arts college experience as an undergraduate student was a commonality for a majority of the participants in this study. Ethel, Marcy, Beth, Bryan, and Rebecca all earned their undergraduate degree at a small, private, liberal arts college. Jill was the only participant who was not educated at this type of institution; she attended a prestigious Ivy League university. Jill studied the humanities and her involvement as a leader in the campus community allowed her to be fully immersed in a similar fashion as the other participants. All of the participants who attended liberal arts colleges articulated a clear message regarding the impact and value of such an educational setting. They described how the liberal arts college environment shaped them to develop as a

young adult and shaped them into the person they are today. Their positive experiences as college students cemented a commitment to the liberal arts college mission.

Ethel shared that she fell in love with the higher education experience and noted that it was a result of her specific campus environment. Marcy echoed similar feelings and spoke about the value of her rich, holistic residential experience. She shared that even as a young student, she “knew there was magic in that.” Even though Beth came from humble beginnings, she loved being thrust into what she described as a “high-end” and “preppy kind of atmosphere.” She further described her liberal arts college as “everything that I had imagined what a college experience would feel like.” These participants shared their thoughts about the uniqueness of the liberal arts college environment and the ways it contributed to their overall development. They all passed on larger universities in favor of the more intimate campus environment. Rebecca shared that, “I had opportunities to go to some Ivy League schools and get scholarships.” Instead, she chose to enroll at a liberal arts college and paid full tuition. Bryan described having a transformative experience as a student and was thankful for the influential individuals who “lifted me up and kept me there” despite some family challenges in his first year of college. Rebecca agreed with the transformative nature of her college and lauded the deep sense of community she experienced in that environment. She positioned that feeling of community is generally a standard shared amongst the multiple liberal arts colleges that she has been affiliated with as both a student and student affairs professional.

Rebecca expanded on the influence of the small college and the corresponding sense of culture found at these types of institutions. She praised the sense of community and supportive culture at North College. Rebecca reflected,

What I find here is that with colleagues I don't have to have somebody else lose for me to win. We just all support each other. I don't get more if somebody else gets less, and that is for the betterment of the institution. That spirit is rampant everywhere through the students, with faculty, through the staff.

Rebecca along with the other participants spoke about the simple pleasures of the small, private, liberal arts college environment. They value the opportunity to, “know just about every person’s name,” collaborate frequently with others, and join in fellowship at community events and athletic games. Several of the participants even reflected on the meaning of having their children attend campus functions and their ability to be part of that community. Input from the participants highlights the value of strong support networks which are common at small, private, liberal arts colleges.

Each of the participants’ personal experiences as undergraduate students inspired them to pursue professional opportunities at small, private, liberal arts colleges. Rebecca shared that her current institution’s mission resonated within her and she declared confidently, “I am where I’m supposed to be.” The participants spoke at length during the site visits about intentionally seeking out professional opportunities at institutions similar to their alma mater. When asked about her level of comfort at Hill College during the mobile interview, Beth described it as a feeling of being “home.” She added that

even back when she was a new employee, Hill College felt familiar and reminiscent of her own college campus.

All of the participants demonstrate a strong sense of commitment to the liberal arts education simply based on their years of employment at these types of institutions. Each participant has served at their current respective institution for at least five years, with four of the six serving over 10 years. Ethel and Marcy have the longest service tenure as dean of students at their colleges with 26 and 21 years respectively. These two participants have even more years of service at their current colleges from their time spent in other administrative roles prior to being appointed to the dean position. When I examined each curriculum vitae for comprehensive years of employment at liberal arts institutions, each participant has a minimum of 15 years of service, whether it be at one college or multiple liberal arts institutions. Each participant made comments during the site visit about how they were attracted to a career in the liberal arts college environment.

All of the participants had to leave the liberal arts college environment at some point in their careers to further their education through graduate training programs. Ethel, Marcy, Beth, Bryan, and Rebecca all enrolled in master's programs immediately after completing their bachelor's degrees. All of the participants earned their graduate degrees at large research universities. Ethel, Bryan, and Rebecca continued their graduate training further, earning doctorate degrees after working in the student affairs field for a number of years. Regardless of their individual journeys, each participant clearly articulated a strong desire and an intentional plan to pursue employment opportunities at small, private, liberal arts colleges. There is a strong lineage between

being a graduate of a liberal arts college and serving as a dean of students at the same type of institution in this case study. Another influential factor was participants' connections to their dean of student when they were a college student.

Experiences with their dean, the deity. All six of the participants in this study reminisced about the person who served as the dean of students during their undergraduate career. Each participant was able to recall that individual by name without hesitation. I found it rewarding to join participants on an exploration of their past, specifically regarding these influential figures from their transformative years. It was evident that my interview prompts evoked feelings of nostalgia for most participants. I observed jovial facial expressions and even several audible chuckles when I asked them to reflect on their dean when they were college students. I had a strong sense that in most cases these figures from the past had a profound impact on the dean my participants had become today. I felt it was useful to explore those memories as a way to give context to the present.

Although all six participants could name their dean of students while in college, Ethel was the only one who was unable to recall specific interactions with that individual. She remembered meeting her dean once and commented that she was a pleasant person. Ethel rationalized that this was a result of her not being involved in the campus community because she spent all of her time focused on academics. The five other participants were able to provide vivid descriptions of their dean's appearance, demeanor, and reputation. Bryan was the only participant who had two deans serve during his undergraduate career; the first dean relocated to a new college after his sophomore year.

A majority of the deans were male during the participants' college years. The two exceptions are that Ethel's dean was female along with Bryan's second dean. The historical literature on deans of students highlighted that a majority of these positions were occupied by males following World War II and into the late 20th century (Nidiffer, 2000; Schwartz, 2010). I found it noteworthy that five of the six participants in this study are females, which is the opposite ratio from the deans during their college years. Moreover, there are only three males currently serving as dean of students from the 13 institutions excluded from this study in the Memorial and Monumental conferences. The distinct change in demographics over the past several decades is irrefutable.

Marcy, Beth, Bryan, Rebecca, and Jill all spoke highly of the individuals who served as their dean of students. They all recalled having prolonged engagement with these administrators throughout their college tenure, most commonly due to their extracurricular involvement. Marcy and Beth noted that initial interactions with their dean were the result of minor disciplinary infractions related to drinking and partying. Both participants further explained that these developmental conversations served as a gateway to more productive interactions with their dean. The participants noted their deans had a prominent presence on their campus. They each described these individuals as role models and advocates for students. Marcy used symbolism to describe her dean citing a popular literary character from the Harry Potter series, stating that the students, "needed to know...Dumbledore is out there and that he cares." Marcy alluded to his seemingly mystical presence on campus. She continued,

Our dean of students had to kind of be that sort of remote and sort of wise and sort of caring...somewhat this deity...and the campus is in good shape because I'm out there. That sort of sense of protection in some ways. I think it was reassuring to people.

The participants all had favorable memories of their deans, and none of them perpetuated negative stereotypes often depicted in popular culture through college movies.

The participants mentioned the impact of their dean being both visible and accessible to students. They stressed the importance of the dean being seen around campus at various events and activities including athletic games and social celebrations. Participants additionally recalled interacting with their dean through student leadership experiences such as honor code committees, resident assistant training, and student government meetings. Rebecca noted that her dean positively influenced the overall campus culture. Rebecca explained that she and her peers always expected to see the dean around campus and anticipated frequent interaction with him. She went on to reflect, “so that probably explains a lot as to why I feel like I have to do that.” Rebecca’s statement led me to believe that she feels it is her responsibility to extend the legacy that her dean embodied. There was a clear indication that their deans made a positive impact, which commonly evolved into a more personal and individualized mentoring relationship.

The participants made reference to their deans serving as influential role models during their college experience. They admired these individuals most notably due to their genuine care for students and dedication to the community. Participants told stories about

prolonged engagement with their dean. The progression generally started with quick and surface-level interactions, which led to more casual and personalized engagements during their upperclassmen years. These connections transcended into mentoring relationships, as many of the participants began considering future careers in higher education at this time in their life. Rebecca reflected that over time she began to learn about and increasingly appreciate her dean's balanced level of composure through their frequent interaction. She reflected that it served as a guiding force and is still one of the strongest influences on her career to this day. These deans provided professional guidance and encouraged the participants to enroll in student affairs graduate programs. Bryan noted that his second dean, "became and remains probably my number one mentor." Beth, Bryan, and Rebecca each detailed how they remained connected to their deans after they graduated from college and into their developing professional careers.

Three of the female participants, Marcy, Beth, and Jill, spoke about the importance of female mentors in their college student development. Each of these women had men holding the Dean of Student title during their undergraduate years. They were positively influenced by these male figures, but they also sought to establish additional connections with females serving in Associate and Assistant Dean roles. Marcy shared that it was crucial for her to have a female mentor at that point in her developmental period. Jill reflected that it was important for her to see a woman serving in this type of role. Jill elaborated,

She also was a mother. Had two children. And so how she was navigating the balance of raising kids and doing work at a residential college. She had a sense of

humor. She was smart, very down-to-earth, and approachable. And you could tell she enjoyed relationships with students.

Jill went on to note that this female mentor advanced her career by moving to California to serve as the Dean of Students at a noteworthy liberal arts college.

The participants in this study were able to speak about the positive influence their deans had on them as developing college students. These mentor relationships led to their eventual enrollment in student affairs graduate programs. They were inspired to pursue careers as deans of students as a result of the meaningful connections they established with their dean of students. These connections had a lasting impact on each participant. Their personal development was also influenced by their purposeful engagement as student leaders in the college community.

Student leadership and moments that mattered. Astin's (1984) student involvement theory highlighted the quality and quantity of the physical and psychological energy that a college student devotes to their college experience. His foundational student development theory stated that greater involvement leads to increased levels of student learning and personal development (Astin, 1984). Astin (1984) positioned that involvement can take place in multiple forms, including dedication to academic work, engagement in extracurricular activities, and interaction with faculty and student affairs personnel. As covered in the previous section, a majority of participants in this study were closely connected to their dean of students and other influential administrators. Based on Astin's (1984) theory, all six participants in this study were highly involved as

college students. The following section explores participant's involvement during their undergraduate years.

Marcy, Beth, Bryan, Rebecca, and Jill reflected primarily on their involvement in regards to extracurricular activities and interaction with faculty and staff. Ethel was the only exception and clearly stated that she was not affiliated with any student organizations during her college years. Rather, she detailed spending all of her time engrossed in academics and working directly with faculty members. During a member check with Ethel, she shared that she served as an undergraduate teaching fellow during her third and fourth years of college. In this role, she assisted with instruction by leading students in small discussion groups for larger first-year courses. Ethel's intense focus on her academic work is nonetheless compatible with Astin's (1984) student involvement theory. Ethel's commitment to scholastic involvement continued throughout most of her adult life leading to multiple graduate degrees, including a doctorate in education. Bryan was the only other participant to speak specifically about his connection with an academic faculty member. He shared that one of his psychology professors quickly realized that he was a student leader and encouraged him to study student development theories in his free time as an undergraduate student. Bryan felt this early exposure helped him conceptualize that the impact he was able to make as a college student could eventually lead to a professional career. Involvement in the campus community through student leadership was a topic that was repeatedly discussed by most participants.

Marcy, Beth, Bryan, Rebecca, and Jill all shared details of their involvement through various student organizations. They detailed how their membership in these

organizations provided meaning for not only their college experience, but also how this involvement contributed to both their personal and professional development. All five participants took that engagement a step further by serving in additional leadership positions. One of the most common forms of involvement and leadership for participants was service as a resident assistant.

Resident assistants are trained peer leaders who provide support to other students living in residence halls on college campuses. These paraprofessionals are tasked with various responsibilities including community development, assisting with daily residential needs, and providing leadership to the community. Resident assistants work closely with professional residence life staff members to foster a safe and healthy living environment. Marcy, Beth, Bryan, and Rebecca, all served as resident assistants for several years during their undergraduate term. All four shared how this form of involvement inspired their pursuit of a career in student affairs and higher education.

Marcy loved the sense of responsibility associated with crisis management and quickly realized that she could effectively maintain her composure during these tense situations. She shared an insightful story about a night when a tornado touched down on her rural campus. All of the professional staff members were away and she was the only senior resident assistant present. Marcy, “had to take charge” of the campus while working closely with the local sheriff. As a result of this encounter she developed a heightened sense of confidence, which inspired her to continue involvement in the residence life field after graduation. Beth also credits her early experiences as a resident assistant, “for a lot of what I am today” in reference to her advancement to the dean of

students role. Rebecca echoed that sentiment and confirmed that of all of her student involvement, which included varsity athletics and a social sorority, her service as a resident assistant proved to be the most impactful on her career in student affairs.

Marcy and Beth revealed that their initial interest in the resident assistant (RA) position occurred in a circuitous manner. Both participants detailed a similar history of excessive partying prior to joining the resident assistant ranks. During developmental conversations with their respective deans of students, they were encouraged to pursue the resident assistant position to channel their leadership skills and energy towards a productive cause. Marcy and Beth reflected that the RA opportunity allowed them to realize their potential and eventually discover a meaningful career path.

The participants highlighted other forms of campus involvement and leadership roles that contributed to their personal development and exploration of the student affairs field. Marcy, Bryan, and Rebecca were all members of Greek organizations. These social fraternity and sorority organizations provided leadership opportunities and philanthropic engagement to enhance campus community development. Bryan and Rebecca served as campus tour guides, assisting with prospective student recruitment. Through this involvement they learned how to promote unique opportunities and attractive services readily available to students at their respective institutions.

My interview questions allowed Bryan to recall two particular leadership experiences that had a profound impact on his personal development and career aspirations. Bryan served on his institution's renowned honor council, which adjudicated violations of the honor code. He described this as being one of the oldest and most

historic college honor codes in the country. He was eventually elected as president of the council during his senior year. Bryan spoke of several extremely challenging cases that ultimately resulted in he and the honor council having to expel their peers. He stated those experiences provided him with a, “real taste for that part of college student development that is really all about decision making and judgement.” Bryan was also tasked with making important judgements and decisions as the student representative on the search committee to fill the dean of students position, which was vacated by his first dean. He shared that his experience in evaluating potential campus leaders, along with the subsequent connection that he developed with his second dean who filled the position, as being incredibly influential on his own career. He proclaimed, “I’ll never forget the impression she gave me” as a student. Bryan went on to state that because of the dean’s inspiring presence during that interview, “I’ve modeled that in every interview since.” This comment also reinforced how previous deans influence the participants’ behavior.

Jill was deeply committed to student government and was eventually elected to serve as senior class president at her institution. The student government leadership position provided her with the opportunity to regularly connect with the institution’s president, dean of students, and other key administrative staff. Jill contemplated on the significance of experiential learning as a college student, stating that she gained, “so much more from the events outside the classroom.” She reflected that during these moments as a young adult, “I saw myself...being a dean of students” one day later in her life. All of these instances of involvement and leadership during participants’

undergraduate years reveals the corresponding influence that impacted their personal and professional development.

Summary. The first categorical finding illuminates the influence of each participant's personal history on their experiences as deans of students. Their college environment as undergraduates, the influential administrators they formed connections with, and their involvement as student leaders directed their development with sustained influence and inspired them to pursue careers in student affairs. Astin's (1984) involvement theory supports the importance of academic and extracurricular engagement along with meaningful connection to faculty and administrative personnel. These past experiences propelled participants to continue their education and enroll in graduate training programs to further their knowledge and commitment to the field of student affairs. The culmination of these experiences ultimately lead to their eventual professional appointment. Their personal history as college students also influences the connections they develop with students in their current role as dean of students.

Institutional factors. The second category that emerged reveals institutional factors that impacted participants' actions and responsibilities as the dean of students. This context provided valuable insight regarding their overall work environment and responsibilities. The organizational structure guided by the mission of the institution, particularly as it relates to the operation and function of the dean of students position contributes to this finding. These factors also determined the expectations of the deans' daily work. Prominent colleagues in senior leadership positions had an influence on how participants spent their time, which impacted their duties and approach to working with

students. This category highlights both advantageous and adverse aspects of institutional influence on participants' ability to connect with students. Two subcategories were uncovered that detail the specific institutional factors that impact their experience. First, the influence of the President and their leadership cabinet is explained. Next, the constant balance between the vice president and dean of students roles is examined.

Serving as a window to the world of students. Each of the small, private, liberal arts colleges included in this case study fall under the leadership of a president, appointed by their respective board of trustees. Each president operates with the assistance of an executive cabinet of advisers. These cabinet members represent specific functional areas including academics, finance, and student affairs. They advise the president on various issues related to the institution and its direction. It is common practice for incoming presidents to select their own cabinet members once they are appointed to office. All of the participants in this study are members of their president's executive cabinet and generally hold vice presidential titles. Each participant plays a vital role on this advisory team and serves as the senior student affairs officer. As senior student affairs officers, the participants reported organizationally to the president, so all matters related to student life are communicated directly to the president and the cabinet through this role. In addition to the practical benefits of reporting to the president, Marcy explained that it is also symbolically important for her to serve on the cabinet so that, "student affairs can be at the table" for critical decisions that could impact the future of the college and the student experience. She stated that her involvement on the leadership team demonstrates to the campus community that they are "student-focused and here first for the students."

Contrarily, all of the participants noted spending a considerable amount of their time each week in meetings with the president and these other senior leaders.

Ethel, Marcy, Beth, Bryan, and Rebecca held their leadership positions prior to the appointment of their current president. I was surprised to learn this information given that college presidents often choose their own senior leadership team. Jill is the only exception, as she was recruited to Spring College by her president approximately two years after he assumed office. Before being hired at Hill College, Beth served as the Vice President and Dean of Students at another small, private, liberal arts college. She shared that when the president who hired her retired, the incoming president, “did not want any of his remaining vice presidents to stay with him.” At that point Beth was forced to relocate and take a leadership position at another institution.

Most of the participants worked at their colleges for a significant number of years under multiple presidents. Several participants spoke about how they believe their extensive years of service and institutional knowledge contributed to being retained during presidential transition periods. Ethel reflected on her institutional value and unique knowledge and proclaimed that, “nobody else can do this piece of work that the president asks me to do.” Rebecca noted that her incoming president made it clear that he felt she was the “right fit for the position” as part of his strategic vision. Beth shared that she was initially hired by a different president and “I’m now on my second president here. That’s always interesting to be a part of.” Marcy explained that throughout all of her years serving on the cabinet, “there were 27 faces that have come and gone.” She recalled a recent conversation with her president who was hired only about a year prior to

our interview. She joked with him about her membership on the cabinet and exclaimed, “I just want to remind you that I am the historian of the group at this point!”

Ethel shared that her approach to working with the multiple presidents she served under at Adams College has always been influenced by her unique start to working in higher education. Her first professional position before being promoted to dean of students was as Executive Assistant to the President of Adams College back in 1981. In this position she was part of the president’s senior staff. Ethel explained that she was trained to be “entirely 100% focused on the president and what the president wanted.” She went on to add the lasting impact of that and stated, “I don’t think I’ve ever quite gotten over that.” Ethel spoke about the importance of the relationship shared between the president and the dean of students and the subsequent impact it could have on the work of the senior student affairs officer. She opened up,

You could be very popular with students and not get along with the president and that would be problematic. And it could be the other way around and that could be very problematic. But I do think that the president’s expectations around the way you do your work are interesting.

Ethel went on to share a sentiment echoed by many of the other participants. She felt that most presidents do not have a comprehensive understanding of student affairs, and that managing that dynamic is an important part of the dean of students position.

Many college presidents rise up through the ranks of academia, and more recently by way of the fundraising field or as politicians. The dean plays a pivotal role by advocating for the needs of students directly to the president and the cabinet. Marcy

explained it was her job to constantly educate each of the presidents she worked with on important topics related to the student experience. She described it as a combination of, “making sure they look good and also that student affairs does not suffer in the process.” Beth shared a similar perspective and stressed the importance of the dean of students fully understanding their president’s approach and style along with their strengths and weaknesses. She compared herself to a “union rep” who is constantly advocating for a focus on student affairs to the president. Bryan labeled himself as the president’s “right hand” man, often serving as his confidant. He always helps his president understand the student experience and advises him on major decisions and the subsequent effect on students. Each of the participants in this study frequently spoke about how their relationship with the president influences their own work as dean with the students.

The participants made it clear that although most of their presidents interacted with students on occasion, they still relied heavily on the deans for direct insight into the student life climate on campus. Beth shared that it is, “her job to keep things off of the president’s desk.” Rebecca stated that she uses her discretion to determine if her president should be informed of certain campus activity or community needs. She will also provide him guidance on, “moments that he shouldn’t miss or moments that he should be there to celebrate.” Rebecca added that, “I’m his kind of pulse of what is going on. Not only with the student body, but I would say if you were to talk to him, he would probably say for the entire college and the senior staff.” She described that it is essential for her to be involved and in tune with the lives of the students so she can best represent their voice with the senior leadership of the institution. Rebecca’s president needs her to

develop and maintain meaningful connections with students to provide vision and stability for the college.

Ethel shared that there have been presidents at Adams College who were particularly interested in students and there were also presidents “who really didn’t like students.” In instances where presidents were not welcoming, students would go to Ethel for everything. As a result, she would be inundated with a myriad of concerns. She spoke about one of her presidents who was well-liked and incredibly student-oriented. Students would often take their concerns directly to that president and it would lighten Ethel’s work load. She extended that it was also beneficial to have the president more connected to the student experience. She explained that favorable dynamic made it easier for her to advocate for student needs.

Bryan explained that because of the current president he works for, “it’s really hard to be a traditional dean of students.” Bryan used the phrase, “in the weeds” often during our time together to describe direct interactions with students. I asked him to elaborate on this concept and he provided the example of helping individual students with their personal challenges. He shared, “being in the middle of solving a problem, walking them over to the Registrar’s office or the Bursar’s office.” Bryan explained that the previous president he served under at Laurel College preferred the opposite, wanting him to be heavily involved in direct problem solving with individual students. Rather than being “in the weeds” his current president, “wants me vision, vision, vision, lead, lead, lead.” The omnipresence of strategic demands on participants in this study will be

further detailed in the following subcategory that examines the duality of the shared vice president and dean of students roles.

Vice President and Dean of Students balance. Each of the participants in this study currently fulfill a dualistic role that encompasses a plethora of professional responsibilities. All of the individuals are responsible for providing both strategic leadership along with direct oversight of the student experience. The former description best represents the vice president of student affairs position, while the latter describes the dean of students role. Ethel, Marcy, Beth, Bryan, and Rebecca all formally hold two titles, Vice President along with Dean of Students. Although Jill currently holds a singular title, Dean of the College, she explained that her responsibilities as assigned by the president entail those of both the vice president and dean of students. Jill revealed an upcoming administrative reorganization that would have her formally adopt the vice president title in the following academic year. Jill further explained that consequentially, she would most likely relinquish the dean of students role, and promote one of her senior staff members to that position.

A dean of students is generally regarded as an administrator in the student affairs division directly responsible for the oversight and implementation of services for the undergraduate college student experience on campus (Appleton et al., 1978; Dinniman, 1977; Rhatigan & Schuh, 1993, Tederman, 1997). The origin of the dean of students position can be traced back to the evolutionary track of both the dean of women's and dean of men's roles (Nidiffer, 2000; Schwartz 2010). Given the historical context, the dean generally works closely with faculty and administration, while also maintaining

direct connection with the student body to serve their needs. The vice president of student affairs title was adopted over the past several decades on many college campuses to identify senior-leadership in the student affairs division. Individuals in these positions are generally charged with greater oversight of assessment, operating budgets, crisis-management, professional staff supervision, and direct consultation with the president and the president's cabinet; essentially leading the overall direction of the student affairs mission (Bass, 2006; Flanagan, 2006; Rhatigan & Schuh, 1993; Westfall, 2006). As demonstrated by the group of participants, it is common for one individual to hold both positions at small, private, liberal arts colleges. The participants provided a wealth of knowledge regarding their view of the responsibilities for each of the two positions, along with the advantageous and adverse aspects of the duality as it relates to developing connections with students.

Bryan reflected that there is, "a history to that title" when he was asked what the dean of students position meant to him. He expanded that there is, "a connotation to the title of dean as a problem-solver, advocate, and a go-to" resource for college students. Bryan and Jill both vocalized that the dean of students should be focused on student welfare. Beth described it as, "somebody who's focus is a student-centered job. That everything they do is really connecting with students on a daily basis. So even the physical, day-to-day, hourly kind of connection, is really—the focus is always with the students." Ethel, Rebecca, and Jill all described the dean of students as someone focused on the lives of students outside of the classroom, with Ethel noting specific attention to the "quality of life."

Like Beth, Ethel also used the phrase “day-to-day” several times when describing the work of the dean of students. She continually spoke about the concept relating to constant connection with students and being, “student-driven.” Marcy continually used the phrases, “care and feeding” and “nurturing the soul” to describe the position. She expanded that connections built through social exchanges with students help them develop and overcome personal challenges. Marcy likened the dean to a, “senior pastor of a church,” looking out for the well-being of the student community. Rebecca delivered a clear message when summarizing her responsibilities as dean and stated, “I feel it is my number one job to spend time with students.” The participants provided a contrasting view when they discussed the vice presidential side of their responsibilities.

A vice president of student affairs provides vision and senior-leadership to their student affairs division. These individuals report directly to the president of the institution and are the voice of the student experience on the executive cabinet. All of the participants continually used the terms visionary and strategic to describe their approach in the vice president role. These descriptors were vocalized during site visits, written in the reflective journals, and reaffirmed in the member check conversations. They spoke about being involved in high-level conversations that would have an influence on the student experience for years to follow. Jill explained that she is regularly making decisions and developing division priorities that will impact students in the future. Beth and Bryan both used the exact same phrase, “30,000-foot visionary level” on multiple occasions to describe the scope of their work and the forward-thinking demands of the position. When asked to revisit that quote during his member check, Bryan extended that

he considers himself a “visionary architect” at Laurel College. That title is fitting given Bryan’s management of a variety of construction and renovation projects involving several residence halls and the new dining facility on campus. The immense responsibility associated with the vice president position also caused participants a significant level of frustration.

Marcy and Beth shared that over the past several years the vice president role has consumed almost most of their time and energy. All of the participants noted that the senior-leadership position unfortunately leads to them, “always being in meetings.” Beth frustratingly divulged that she is living in “a world of constant litigious material on my desk.” Marcy shared that some of her responsibilities as vice president have a “corporate feeling.” She continued that her president is incredibly “corporate-minded and not as much concerned with the community aspect.” His philosophy as the leader of the college naturally impacts the way she is expected to approach her work. She disclosed the increased feeling of dissonance under the new leadership regime at Fox College. Marcy, along with several of the other participants felt the vice presidential responsibilities inevitably pull them away from their student affairs perspective. Beth hesitantly reflected that she feels that as vice president, she is a “true administrator” and has lost much of her daily contact with students. All of the other participants shared her sentiment on some level.

Each of the participants revealed the continual evolution of their daily experiences due their decision to take on vice presidential responsibilities after years of more traditional student affairs work. Rebecca spoke directly about this adaptation noting the

work can be very different from that of the dean of students. She stated bluntly, “it’s stuff that’s not student affairs.” During Jill’s member check, she lamented about how her connection to students has steadily decreased due to the increased vice presidential demands and the associated “bureaucracy.” Jill felt that the vice president will always have less student contact. Too, Ethel explained during her member check that she is now forced to be more “hands-off versus being accessible.” Beth reflected that, “over time connections to students dwindled as I rose up the organizational structure.” Ethel shared a poignant thought about the evolution of her work and the inevitable distance it creates with students. She begrudgingly proposed a metaphor,

I’ve sort of tried to push back against it, and still do. But it seems like the tide is just sort of like going in a certain direction. Like I can swim against it, I can swim harder, but it keeps pushing me out to sea because there is just a lot of work.

All of the participants shared their thoughts on how the duality of their roles requires them to constantly balance their efforts between direct interactions with students and strategic planning and visionary leadership. I was left with a resounding message of complexity after listening to their stories about navigating the two roles.

Each of the participants made it explicit that in isolation, they believe a dean of students should have direct connection with students and be a normal presence in their daily lives. Too, they reflected that type of connection is less realistic with the growing responsibilities of a corresponding vice president role. Several of the participants spoke about the overall movement in higher education to combine the two positions at small, private, liberal arts colleges. They also extended that some colleges are now doing the

opposite and discussing the possibility of separating in favor of two distinct roles. Since this concept was mentioned during several site visits, I decided to have each participant further explore this idea in their journal reflections.

I proposed that they place themselves in a hypothetical mindset of being responsible for creating a brand new small, private, liberal arts college. I then asked based upon their own personal experiences would they choose to appoint one individual to both the dean of students and vice president roles or separate those positions and hire two individuals. The results of that reflection were essentially split. Ethel, Beth, and Jill felt strongly that the two roles should be separated. Ethel believed that right now it is the “more practical approach.” Beth noted given the complexity of today’s higher education world, “combining the positions is ridiculously overwhelming for one individual, coupled with immense responsibility and accountability levels.” Jill proclaimed that she would have a dean of students focus exclusively on direct student support and crisis management, while the vice president would stick to strategic planning and other management and assessment responsibilities.

Marcy and Rebecca acknowledged the complexity the shared responsibilities created, but were hesitant to split them apart. Marcy noted that despite being, “stretched and often conflicted by the tension of balancing access to students and with senior staff responsibilities, it is important and essential.” Too, Rebecca was mindful of the challenges, but explained, “I don’t think you can appropriately lead and advocate for students as the vice president without being the dean.” Bryan provided an equally valuable response without taking a clearly defined stance. He believed, “the decision

about a combined or separate vice president and dean of students should be based upon the portfolio and expectations of student affairs at the college.” He noted both the potential positive and negative ramifications of either decision. Bryan also reiterated how the expectations of the president could ultimately determine the decision.

Jill shared the upcoming plan for her to formally adopt the Vice President title and relinquish the dean of students responsibilities in the coming months. It is evident that prior to my visit, this difficult topic was already actively being discussed at Spring College. Ethel alluded to the idea that it would make more sense to promote her most senior staff member to serve as the dean of students. Knowing that Ethel is most likely in the later stage of her career, I would not be surprised if she changed the organizational structure at some point before she retires. Both Marcy and Bryan divulged ongoing discussions about reorganization at their respective institutions. They each noted hesitations and specifically mentioned the political and power implications that could come into play with any potential changes. Marcy updated during her member check that she will maintain both roles, but is in the process of creating a more vertical organizational structure at Fox College and will subsequently reduce her number of direct reports by half. Bryan disclosed during our follow up that he is being courted by several prominent liberal arts colleges. This topic has been one of the main points of discussion with the consultation firms that oversee these searches. He shared that reflecting on this subject during my research study has better prepared him for those conversations. Rebecca explained that this conundrum is frequently brought up by her president, but she always self-advocates to maintain both positions to best serve the students. She believed

it is vital for her to hold both positions in order to maintain the bridge between the students and college leadership. This finding illuminates that there is not a perfect formula to solve this debate and that institutional context and individual preferences are paramount.

Summary. The second categorical finding illuminates the influence of institutional factors on the experiences of deans of students. The participants' ability to connect with students was impacted by several aspects. The philosophy and approach of the college's president affected their work expectations. Participants highlighted varied experiences as a result of working with multiple presidential leaders throughout their careers. Too, their membership on executive cabinets positively influenced their ability to advocate for students. Subsequently, these senior staff meetings occupied a significant amount their time and diminished the opportunity to engage with the campus community. The most prominent factor was the constant balancing act they were forced to navigate as a result of holding both dean of students and vice president roles. The participants provided vivid descriptions of both the advantageous and adverse effects of the duality. Institutional factors had a substantial influence on their ability to develop connections with students.

Attributes and characteristics. The third category that emerged uncovers significant personal attributes and characteristics that contribute to the ability to develop meaningful connections with the student population at large. This section begins with a focus on an innate quality that is shared collectively among the participants. This personal attribute provides meaning to understand the natural temperament common

amongst the deans of students in this study. The humane aspect of this quality rises to prominence in this finding. Next, distinctive traits highlight learned and developed behavior over time in the form of characteristics. These personal characteristics explain how deans are able to successfully reach students in the community and form significant bonds. The attributes and characteristics stress the compassionate nature and deliberate behavior of individuals who gravitate towards this type of helping profession in the student affairs field. This categorical finding links the inherent disposition and approach of the participants to one of the fundamental functions of the dean of students position; connecting with students.

These attributes and characteristics were prominent throughout every part of this research study and were symbolic in each form of data collected. They surfaced during interviews, became visible in artifact review, were observed during campus tours, reflected on in journals, and extended in member check conversations. I worked with all of the participants to differentiate between various attributes and characteristics. The participants helped me organize the preliminary ideas and then refine them for increased clarity during our member check conversations. Data was further consolidated to illuminate the most significant and overarching attributes and characteristics. We came to a mutual agreement that an attribute would be thought of as inborn, natural quality, while characteristics would be described as more learned traits and in some ways developed behavior. This process once again speaks to the co-construction of knowledge prevalent in this study. A collection of pivotal attributes and characteristics identified in each of the participants follows.

Attributes. For the purpose of this study, the term attribute is used to describe an inherent part of a person. The *Online Etymology Dictionary* further defines attributes as qualities belonging to someone. Attributes represent the participants' natural disposition in regards to how deans of students develop connections with students. The most prominent attribute, caring, is uncovered in the following section.

Caring: "If you love being with young people". A deep sense of care and concern for students was found prominently in every aspect of this study. The participants continually made it explicitly clear that care and concern for the community served as the driving force for their work as dean of students. The *Online Etymology Dictionary* provides context that a caring person can be regarded as compassionate and attentive to the needs of others. In my member check with Bryan he again spoke about how his historical knowledge of the dean of students position influenced his approach to care for and connect with students. Bryan acknowledged that he hopes to be perceived as genuine with students. He explained that students at Laurel College, "expect to know administration, they expect to connect with the administration." His goal is to not only establish a high number of connections with a variety of students, but more importantly to establish "depth in relationships." This statement resonated with a metaphorical image that Bryan described during my initial interview with him in reference to previously working at a large university. When I asked him to expand upon his level of care for students at Laurel College, he shared, "I want to connect with students. I want to make a difference in their lives. I felt like a machine at a big institution. I felt like a piece of a machine." He went on to explain that now as a dean in a small college environment he

has the opportunity to routinely demonstrate his level of care for students in his own way that is meaningful.

Rebecca shared that her focus is always on others and felt that in order to successfully develop connections a dean has to love students. She continued, “If you love being with young people, helping them, challenging them, encouraging them, this job never feels like a job.” Marcy and Bryan used the exact same language when they made the point that their work is continually guided by, “doing what is best for students.” Marcy spoke about her job as dean being focused on the, “care and feeding” of the community. She felt it was her responsibility to connect with students to, “help them individually and in a way of personal growth.”

Marcy reflected in her journal about a recent occasion when she took a new transfer student out to lunch at a local pizza shop near campus. She learned about a serious family crisis that forced him to travel home for a few days. She decided it was the right time for her to make a direct connection with this young man she had yet to meet. At lunch, the student told her that he, “was profoundly moved that I had taken an interest in him.” Marcy did not initially think much of the simple act, but it became clear to her that by just showing that she cared, she made a huge impact on this student. That initial interaction focused on demonstrating care and concern blossomed into a meaningful connection. The other participants shared a similar focus on care for students that guided their work.

Ethel and Jill essentially used the same language to describe their level of care for students. Their guiding principles are to always be kind and try to help students in any

way possible. Each of the participants explained how it was crucial for students to understand that individuals like them care about students' welfare. Ethel, Marcy, and Jill reflected on the importance of letting it be known to students that they are concerned with the quality of their experience and their education. Jill spoke about how it is imperative to actually listen to students in order to demonstrate that she truly understands and therefore is able to respond appropriately. She took it a step further and added that she often asks students if they are actually taking care of themselves. Beth's comment seemed to speak for all of the participants when she stressed that when students know someone like the dean of students cares for them they feel valued.

Those sentiments of feeling valued were reflected in some of the artifacts I discovered in the participants' offices during my site visits. It was common for each dean to have photographs with former students framed and displayed on their walls and bookshelves. Some of these images were the dean with an individual student, while others were with groups of students. These photographs provided a visual representation of the connections formed and the deep level of care that must have been demonstrated by the participant. One of my most memorable artifacts was a gift given to Marcy by a former student athlete from the baseball team.

Marcy picked up a baseball that was displayed on a small shelf in her office. She explained this keepsake was given to her right around the time the student graduated. The ball was signed by the student along with the words, "Thank you for years of guidance, support, and encouragement." On the other side was a modified version of a Henry Adams quote, "A teacher affects eternity; she can never tell where her influence

stops.” This meaningful gift depicted Marcy’s level of care and the subsequent positive influence she had on this particular student. I could tell she cherished this item and she knew it provided an insightful example of how her caring approach translated into a meaningful and sustained connection with a student. The baseball became dear to her and served as a symbol of both the student and the caring relationship they shared.

Other insightful artifacts were found on Bryan’s desk in the form of challenge coins. Bryan showed me two challenge coins that were given to him by two students who graduated and went on to military officer programs. He explained these symbolic coins are to be given to individuals who had the biggest impact on a service person’s development. Bryan understood their meaning and explained that he was deeply touched to have received such an honor from two different students. In his seated interview, Bryan spoke about the importance of meeting students where they are in order to truly help them learn and grow. Jill supported this thought when she talked about “being with them as they are figuring life out.”

The participants all shared stories of how showing they care was essential at times of great distress in a student’s life. More specifically, they all provided examples of when a student’s actions resulted in a violation of the code of student conduct and a subsequent disciplinary process. Ethel, Marcy, Bryan, and Jill provided specific examples of having to deliver disciplinary sanctions to students that resulted in a separation from the college. Jill shared, “discipline cases is where some of the most important growth happens, and I pride myself on staying engaged with students if they’ve taken a leave or even if they’ve left, that they still see me as a resource.”

Rebecca shared that students need caring people around to help them as they navigate college life and transition into adulthood. She said as a caring person she, “helps students become the people that they want to be.” Rebecca then paraphrased the common quote, “Nobody cares how much you know, until they know how much you care.” She echoed that genuinely caring for students is paramount to developing meaningful and sustained connections. Marcy talked about the importance of being with a student, “in their darkest hour” and when they are “most vulnerable.” She provided examples when she was able to maintain a connection with a student and demonstrate kindness and care even when that meant holding them accountable for their actions. Many of the deans shared that students reconnected with them several years later and explained how the care they demonstrated in those challenging moments truly helped them get their life back on track to a productive state. This was the case even for students who could no longer continue their education at the college. Participants shared more celebratory stories about students who went on to complete their degrees.

Many of the participants referenced how their care for students symbolically manifested on graduation day. They shared how seeing specific students walk across the stage to receive their diploma brought forth a wave of emotions and memories. Some of these instances were for exemplary student leaders and their continuous positive interactions. Other times it was a student who struggled and made many poor choices, but still overcame adversity. The participants shared that regardless of the student or the circumstance, these moments reminded them that caring for each and every

undergraduate can have a lasting impact on student development and success. I will close this section with a focus on one specific participant.

Throughout all of my interactions with Rebecca, both in person and remotely, she embodied care and dedication to students. One of the most tangible moments that represented caring for students came during my stationary interview with her. The stories she told painted a picture in my head of the irreplaceable role she plays at North College. I asked Rebecca to describe her persona on campus. Her response was exactly the image that I portrayed in my mind. Rebecca quickly and confidently told me that she is the, “campus mom” of North College. She said that some students and staff have even used that exact moniker. That metaphor stuck with me throughout this study. Rebecca is ingrained in her community and she openly proclaims that North College and her students are a huge part of her life. She was also forthright in sharing that she married later in life and never had children of her own. Rebecca may not have children by birth, but she most certainly cares for students at North College. She might have been able to see and reach students in ways parents often cannot. Rebecca embodies the earliest deans of students with her unwavering commitment to her community. She cares for North College students just as she would her very own children.

Characteristics. For the purpose of this study the term characteristic is used to describe a distinctive trait. The *Online Etymology Dictionary* further defines characteristics as pertaining to or indicating character. Characteristics represent learned traits and in some ways developed behavior in regards to how deans of students establish connections with students. In my member check with Ethel, she described having to,

“figure out” these characteristics over time. Two key characteristics, approachability and accessibility are highlighted in the following section. Each characteristic will be explained in further detail and uncovered through examples found in the data.

Approachability: “I am one of your people”. Being viewed as approachable is another hallmark of the participants in this study. The *Online Etymology Dictionary* defines this characteristic as affable, friendly, and easy to talk to or open to conversation. Each participant spoke about the influence approachability plays in the process of students connecting with their dean of students. Participants reflected back to experiences with their deans during their college years. They shared that one of the main reasons they were able to develop a connection with their dean was because those individuals were generally so welcoming and approachable. Many work to embody that lasting impression that had such a profound impact on their own development as college students. Marcy, Bryan, and Rebecca all described their deans as being relatable and that it was easy to establish a bond with them. The ability to rapport with students begins with a certain level of internal confidence.

Beth explained that she is incredibly comfortable interacting with students in any capacity. She exuded an innate level of self-assurance during my time interviewing her along with observing her while she engaged with students. Marcy demonstrated a similar level of confidence and explained that she believes her charisma allows her to be seen as approachable to students. Marcy went on to share that she routinely, “auditions for students” to essentially win them over. She will intentionally try to appeal to them and draw them in to develop a meaningful connection. She felt that in order to be relatable to

students, she has to demonstrate that she, “understands their culture.” Marcy will often work to find some sort of common ground with a student she just met. Beth agreed with this tactic and indicated that she has to put in time to become acquainted with students and discover those commonalities. Beth always focuses on disarming students when they first meet so they feel comfortable sharing who they are, where they come from, and other insightful information. The participants used a variety of other tactics to connect with students.

A simple, yet incredibly significant way that deans increased their approachability is through the use of names. Marcy and Rebecca both spoke about the importance of not only learning, but also remembering students’ names. The ability to greet a student and also accompany that salutation with their name instantly increases the likelihood that a relationship will be further developed. Marcy shared an example when a student approached her at a public event and was visibly angry. Marcy was able to quickly address the student by name and she could see that calmed her down. This simple demonstration of familiarity allowed her to disarm the student instantly. Marcy even joked, “she just calmed right down like I completely castrated her.” Rebecca stated that frequently using students’ names prompts them to, “know that I am one of their people.” Some of the other participants admitted that remembering names is not always their strength. They did go on to explain how helpful using names can be in developing a connection. Students’ level of comfort knowing and using their dean’s name was also observed.

Rebecca explained that it is just as important that student also use her name. This reciprocal act helps establish a personal connection. During all of the mobile interview campus tours, I was able to observe both participants and students address each another by name. I observed students walk right up to their dean and strike up both casual and goal-oriented conversations. As Ethel and I walked through campus a female student ran up to her, called her by her dean title and last name, and thanked her for her support at a recent event. Ethel responded using the students name and congratulated her on an accomplishment. Ethel explained the student recently spoke at a large recruitment event for prospective students and their parents. The student was nervous and Ethel shared some words of encouragement prior to her the speech. This observation demonstrated the influence that names have on relationship development. Non-verbal actions also contributed to my understanding of participants' approachability.

The mobile tour observations allowed me to witness physical interactions between participants and students. It was common, especially with Beth, Bryan, and Rebecca, to observe students making physical contact with their dean. This occurred through friendly exchanges such as giving a high-five and even embracing with a hug. In these instances, students ran up to their dean and initiated a hug in public spaces with significant numbers of other students in the surrounding area. These observations clearly demonstrated that students felt comfortable approaching and engaging their dean in a friendly way. In a similar fashion, the participants were also comfortable with this type of personal interaction. These observations left me with a strong impression that the participants created a welcoming environment and were generally seen as approachable. I believe

that part of this level of comfort is influenced by a certain sense of informality on the part of the deans.

Several of the participants shared how they intentionally try to eliminate specific barriers to increase the likelihood of developing connections with students. Many of the participants spoke about wanting to come off as less intimidating to students and more as someone they can relate to on a regular basis. One common way they do so is by talking informally with students and using humor as a way to establish rapport. Another strategy shared focused on how participants dress. Bryan explained that he tries to dress as informal as possible and he believes this makes him appear more approachable to students. Bryan and Rebecca said that unless they have a meeting with the board of trustees, they generally try to dress in casual attire. They spoke at length about how students interact with them more frequently based upon the clothing they wear. Rebecca reflected that in the past she would visit campus on the weekends, “in jeans and a sweatshirt...and students would talk to me way more than Monday through Friday when I was dressed up.” She realized that, “there was a correlation between formality of dress and how much they talked to me.” Since coming to that realization, Rebecca consistently makes sure her clothing is more inviting to students.

Accessibility: “It’s going to them”. The *Online Etymology Dictionary* defines accessibility as affording access and capable of being easily reached. This characteristic connected to approachability, but extends beyond to intentional behavior or a sense of purpose. Approachability speaks more to a friendly demeanor and being inviting for conversation, whereas accessibility is more about being physically present to engage with

others. Bryan described this as a sense of “mindfulness” to make himself routinely accessible for students. All of the participants spoke about the importance of a dean of students being accessible to their campus community. They each recognized the significance of this characteristic in spite of the demands associated with their corresponding vice presidential duties. The participants provided a wealth of examples of how they strive to always remain accessible to students.

The thought of being accessible was represented in many different ways with the participants in this study. Rebecca made an overarching statement about her accessibility, proclaiming that students would say, “that she is around all the time.” Ethel and Beth initially spoke about being accessible for students in a general sense. They described how they commonly have students visit them in their offices to talk about a personal concern, share an issue impacting the community, make a formal complaint, or even to interview them for a project or publication. Their concept of accessibility did not stop at reacting to students. Ethel and Beth, along with the other deans, gave more attention to the proactive ways in which they make themselves available to students.

The state of being easily reached by students is a purposeful act for the participants. A common practice is for the participants to meet students where they spend most of their time. All of the deans provided the same example of how they make sure to eat lunch in the dining hall to increase their accessibility to students. They described this as the one location on campus where almost every student congregates. Given the nature of the small, liberal art college, a vast majority of students live on campus in residential housing and therefore the dining hall is often times the primary

source of nourishment. They all described the common practice of eating with different groups of students or just being available to any student who wants to join them and talk over a meal. Beth joked that often times her presence in the dining hall leads to students complaining about the food service. During her mobile interview in the dining facility she explained it is useful for her to have context and perceive what the students experience first-hand to better understand their views. Another way participants made themselves accessible was to invite students into their own space.

Several of the participants revealed that they routinely host groups of students at their home. Marcy, Beth, and Rebecca all shared stories about organizing various gatherings for students at their house throughout the year. During my campus tour with Beth she intentionally walked me across campus to show me her home. She lives in a large college-owned house, which is situated adjacent to some academic buildings. I could tell that Beth was proud of her home and it was as if she wanted me to see how easy it is for students to travel to visit her. Again, this is another example of the valuable insight gained through the mobile interview. Beth talked about all of the different student groups she interacts with and highlighted the series of dessert parties she hosts for each Greek organization. I could see how Hill College students would enjoy spending time with Beth given her gregarious personality and the proximity of her home. In some ways this may symbolize their home away from home.

Too, Marcy lives in a campus-owned home just a few blocks off of Fox College's campus. Beth and Marcy were actually the only two participants who live in a home owned by their college. In addition to hosting students in her home, Marcy also

highlighted how living in close proximity to campus encourages her to interact with students more frequently in the evening and weekends for campus events. She indicated it was only a short walk from her door to locations where she commonly interacts with students. Rebecca lives considerably farther away, approximately 20 miles from the North College campus. She still manages to host students at her house for dinner. She shared organizing buses to transport students throughout the academic semester and over the summer for resident assistant retreats. I could tell Rebecca was particularly thrilled to host resident assistants just as her dean of students did when she was an undergraduate student leader. The influence of that meaningful connection lives on in the present day at North College. Rebecca shared one other strategy to help her maintain accessibility to students.

I recall at the start of our time together setting up my audio recording device at a table in what I thought was a small meeting room. I asked Rebecca where her office was located in the building because I did not see a desk or a computer. She smiled and replied with a witty, “you’re looking at it!” Rebecca disclosed in her interview that she rarely spends any time in her office. She explained that she uses the campus, particularly the student union building, as her mobile work station. She totes her laptop around and sets up shop wherever she can be most accessible to students at any given time of the day, unless she is in senior leadership meeting. She went on to explain her approach and stated, “It’s going to them, not expecting them to come to me.” After visiting with Rebecca it was evident that she is an outgoing individual, determined on maintaining a constant presence for the students of North College. Another participant wanted to

increase their accessibility to students and did so by developing a coordinated program in order to achieve that goal.

Upon finalizing the date for my trip to Laurel College to meet with Bryan, his assistant enthusiastically informed me that we coordinated the perfect day for a visit. She explained that Bryan was scheduled to host a Mobile Dean event that day and was curious if I wanted to accompany him during my visit. I happily agreed and figured this would be an insightful opportunity for observation. Bryan previously established the Mobile Dean program as a way to remain accessible to all students. He shared that prior to starting the program he felt that he was regularly interacting with 20% of the student body. Bryan explained, “there’s 10% who are involved in everything” then added, “but there’s 10% who are in a perpetual state of crisis.” He followed that his goal was, “to do something to try to start meeting and connect with that other 80%.” Twice a week he and his student affairs staff set up a table in a heavily-trafficked area on campus. They vary the days of the week and times and pick a suitable location based on the weather and flow of students. Their online marketing tagline for the program reads, “Do you have a question, concern, or need a solution?” Each session has a theme and snack giveaway. In a similar fashion to Rebecca’s efforts, but in a more organized way, the Mobile Dean program allows Bryan to get out and meet students where they are on campus. The plan for the program during my visit was that Bryan and his team would make peanut butter and jelly sandwiches for students.

After our stationary interview, Bryan and I set out into the crisp fall air for the late morning Mobile Dean session. A table was set up complete with a table cloth and

corresponding feather sign with the Mobile Dean logo. Bryan would be stationed outside in an area many students pass by in between classes. Before he could even set his belonging down, Bryan was plunged into action. There were students already waiting to speak with him. I observed students confidently walking up to Bryan who sought answers to questions that impacted their experience. One student asked him for an update on the construction progress for the residence hall he hoped to live in next year. Another student sought clarification on some proposed changes to the meal plan. I also witnessed students just casually stopping by to say hello and greet Bryan by name with a high-five or hug. Bryan's efforts to establish the Mobile Dean program allowed him to increase his accessibility and therefore expand his connections with students.

I spoke with one particular junior male student who strolled up to the event to speak with Bryan. After exchanging some basic information, he informed me that he never misses a Mobile Dean session. He then shared that Bryan inspired him and now his goal is to "try to become a dean" in the future. This student described Bryan as "an ambassador between the students and the college leadership." When asked, the student estimated that Bryan probably knew about 90% of the students at Laurel College in some way. Regardless of whether that statistic was accurate, the student was convinced that Bryan was accessible to a majority of the student population. He went on to share that his dean was, "only an email or phone call away" if he ever needed to speak with him. Bryan would not be the only dean who made himself available for remote phone accessibility.

Marcy, Beth, and Rebecca all revealed that they would routinely give out their cell phone numbers to certain students. The examples they provided were giving their number to student leaders or students who recently had a traumatic experience. They were also comfortable communicating with students using their preferred method, exchanging text messages. All three participants shared this was an alternative way to remain accessible to students. The communication would commonly extend into social conversation and even include exchanging jokes and humorous photos from around campus. Hearing their stories made it clear that these text exchanges allowed the deans to further develop their connections with students. There are additional examples of ways each of the participants create avenues to engage with students.

A student at Spring College told me about the “Thankful Thursday” program that Jill established as a way for students to recognize and thank important people in their life. Jill sets up a station in the student union building each Thursday to promote the event and engage with students in a casual manner. While on tour with Beth, we came across a piano in the lounge area of the student union building situated right outside the student affairs office suite. She shared that occasionally she will take a break from working in her office and play the piano. Often times students will stop and listen or join her and they take turns playing songs. Beth described this as a casual and unassuming way for her to interact with students. She felt it is important for students to see her as a person and not only as an administrator. This form of visibility helps Beth break down social barriers to connect with students. It also is an example of how deans make meaningful connections when they least expect it.

Rebecca shared her thoughts on the unexpected and why accessibility and visibility matters. She reflected, “you have to be present because you don’t know the moments when being somewhere is going to matter.” Rebecca then went on to share an emotional story that was clearly very meaningful to her. She recalled crossing paths with a female student on campus one day. She made an effort to make eye contact with the student, then stopped and talked for roughly 10 minutes, asking her about her day and classes. The following day that same student showed up at Rebecca’s office and told her that yesterday she was on her way to commit suicide. The student explained she decided not to proceed with her plan after their impromptu discussion. Rebecca emotionally reflected on the importance of regularly vacating her office, “you never know when being in somebody’s path is going to be the difference that matters more than anything. So that’s why I don’t hang out here. Nobody can see me here.” Marcy shared a similar sentiment when she stressed the importance of always, “showing up” for students. She explained, “every interaction is an opportunity to develop a connection and have a positive impact on a student.”

Summary. The participants in this study possess a shared combination of attributes and characteristics that impact their work as deans of students. A deep sense of care for students was uncovered as an innate humane disposition. This attribute manifested as the foundational quality that linked all of the participants in this study. Approachability is identified as a characteristic associated with individuals who are friendly and easily engage others in conversation. This characteristic extends the attribute of caring and allows for the development of interpersonal connections.

Accessibility is a characteristic that relates to being physically present in order to engage with others in a mindful way. Increased levels of accessibility enabled the participants to develop meaningful and sustained connections with undergraduate students in a purposeful way.

Intentionally developed connections. The fourth category that emerged uncovered connections that participants intentionally nurtured with specific students in the community. The previous finding detailed common attributes and characteristics that assist deans in developing relationships with students in general. The final finding extends the previous category and focuses more on the strategic approach deans employ as a means to actively develop connections with particular students. Each of the participants in this study expounded on various ways in which they were able to build networks with specific students and groups in the community. This section demonstrates that attributes and characteristics are fundamental, but participants were also cognizant that additional effort is essential in successfully establishing certain strategic connections. This finding illuminates participants' awareness of their respective student body and the needs of that given community. Their deliberate actions allowed the deans to initiate critical connections with student leaders, key organizations, and various groups of diverse and underrepresented populations. These connections led to mutually beneficial outcomes for both students and deans, which ultimately aided the institution as a whole.

Connections to student leaders and key organizations: "Without tangible and breathable connection, it unravels". Each of the participants identified that developing connections with various student leaders has always been a major focus during their time

serving as the dean of students. They made it explicitly clear that although some of these connections develop naturally, many times they are the result of their own deliberate effort. The participants discussed ways they seek out student leaders in a very particular manner. They also discussed the mutual benefits that come from connecting with these student leaders. A common message uncovered was that a dean's reputation will impact their ability to establish trust with students. Marcy wrote in her journal reflection that when students are, "gracious enough to trust me and share with me, they are my inspiration and my teachers." She went on to further reflect on the significance that trust plays in developing connections with student leaders at Fox College. She wrote, "at a smaller school like mine, community is delicate and intricate and breakable. Without tangible and breathable connection, it unravels. Trust is broken and developmental learning breaks down." Marcy's reflection illuminated the interconnectedness between personal connections, community, trust, and experiential learning on her campus.

Bryan reflected that unfortunately some students believe it is unfavorable to be connected with the dean of students. They might think this type of relationship could negatively impact their social credibility. Beth shared that it's common for students to view the dean on two opposite ends of the spectrum. She believes that some students view her as either, "the angel or the anti-Christ." Ethel and Beth both discussed how it is important for them to have a favorable reputation amongst the student body, especially with student leaders. They each shared how students always seem to talk with one another about administrators. Beth described the ideal situation being that one student leader would walk out of her office and say to another, "she's pretty good. You're going

to be fine in there. She's pretty cool." The participants shared their views on how they go about successfully gaining the trust of students.

Jill shared that she was told by previous student leaders that she gained their respect and trust through her actions. She earned their allegiance when she followed through with her statements and showed them tangible results and improvements. Jill's commentary was very similar to Rebecca's beliefs on this subject. Rebecca trusts that her reputation will continually allow her to connect with student leaders in a productive way. She made numerous mentions of how focused she is on maintaining her integrity with student leaders. She preached to her student leaders that sometimes integrity is the only thing you can hold on to and it will be a valuable asset, especially in challenging situations. One of the more memorable artifacts I found in her office was a framed photograph of Rebecca with a male student leader who recently graduated from North College. He gave this memento to her and superimposed over their picture was the quote, "Integrity is a powerful force, keeping you alive to others long after you've left their presence." Rebecca's focus on integrity made a lasting impact on that former student leader.

Bryan echoed that credibility and integrity are crucial when he seeks buy-in from a student leader. Bryan shared that he loves the challenge when he senses that a student leader does not trust him. He explained that he will make an intentional effort to sit down with them and talk a situation through until he can successfully gain their trust. He added that it is uncommon that he is unsuccessful in gaining their trust after a productive one-

on-one conversation. Despite Bryan making an effort to engage with students who may have their doubts, many student leaders willingly seek out their deans as well.

Each of the participants noted student leaders being the members of the campus community that they are most closely connected to each academic year. They noted student leaders' deep commitment and involvement in the campus community predisposes them to being more likely to have connections with their dean. This phenomenon is certainly not a surprise given the fact that most of the participants themselves were highly involved student leaders who were closely connected to their deans. It appeared that the participants enjoyed connecting with student leaders that may have reminded them of their former self during their college years. Jill reflected, "I have empathy for their position, having experienced it myself. They are trying to lead their peers and trying to do their academic work at a high level. I have empathy for having to juggle all of that responsibility." She went on to add that these are the students she most commonly checks in with to make sure they are taking care of themselves, given that their focus is often on others. Beth expressed an interest in getting to know student leaders especially when she sees untapped potential. She said her goal is to try to help these students develop their talents. This is just as Beth's dean did when he encouraged her to limit her party lifestyle in favor of student leadership through residence life.

Participants named comparable student leaders when they were asked specifically who they are generally connected with each year on their respective campuses. They highlighted leaders from student government, athletics, Greek organizations, residence life, and multicultural organizations. Fittingly, most of the commonly cited student

leaders the participants claimed to make direct connections with are correspondingly from some of the most notable organizations they also make an effort to incorporate in their community network. Marcy explained that when she develops that foundational connection with a student leader it opens up the possibility to have a “ready pipeline” to the greater organization. She continued if she can gain that first student leader’s trust then she will be more likely to reach the others. She provided a specific example of connecting with the female leader of a peer advocate group and stated, “I needed to illuminate her somehow and I need to get her buy-in” in order to connect with the other students. Developing a connection with that one student boosted her credibility and helped her access to the rest of the group.

In the previous categorical finding, I shared the story about Marcy’s casual trip to the pizza shop which resulted in a meaningful connection with a new transfer student. She went on to explain the ripple effect that initial interaction had on the student’s athletic team. Marcy shared that the student spoke about their time together at his team practice. The coach told her about this a few days later and indicated that several other students also endorsed her, “reputation as a kind and caring person.” She was able to leave a favorable impression on even more students based on the team chatter during practice. This exemplifies how a dean’s positive reputation could potentially help them establish connections with additional students who belong to an influential student group. Participants mentioned student athletes in particular as a group of students who were readily accessible and easy to interact with on a regular basis.

Deans were able to establish connections with student athletes by regularly attending their games. They explained that student athletes appreciated their support and attendance at their competitions usually extended to follow up conversations after the game or the following day. Participants shared that talking about the outcome of the game was an easy way to start conversation and build rapport with students on athletic teams. Jill shared that it was also easier for her to address concerns related to alcohol and parties with students on the football and soccer teams because of her regular attendance at their games. She was able to have fun and productive conversations with the team captains based on their mutual affinity for athletics. Participants' strategic attendance at student organization events was not limited to athletics.

All of the participants also noted being heavily involved in the activities of student government and Greek organizations. Each participant spoke in detail about their close interaction with student body and Greek governing board presidents. Ethel shared a particularly prudent thought by stressing the importance of balancing interactions across all student groups. She continued, "you don't want to become too overly identified with one group of students." She emphasized the importance of always being perceived as remaining impartial amongst all student organizations. Rebecca shared that one way she balances out her attention among the community is to attend at least one meeting or event each year for every recognized student group at North College. She explained this strategy allows her to connect with each group and spread her investment across the community. Rebecca also revisited another way that her informal attire specifically increases her approachability to members of student groups. She will routinely wear an

organization's T-shirt or jersey if they having an upcoming event. She explained, "it's almost like a game" for students to see what she is going to wear each day. This tactic is one memorable way for her to show student organizations that she cares and is invested in their involvement. Regardless of the specific organization, the participants portrayed an advanced understanding of their student body and could identify which specific student leaders and organizations were most beneficial to form strategic connections with each year.

Connections to diverse and underrepresented populations: Students finding voice. Participants shared that they generally strive to remain impartial amongst student organizations on their respective campuses. In spite of this neutrality, they were all in agreement that certain populations of students deserve their additional attention. Each dean shared their views on making an intentional effort to establish meaningful and sustained connections with diverse and underrepresented populations. Ethel was particularly animated when she proclaimed, "it is not enough to connect with some students. We have to be intentional in reaching out to a diverse group of students whose needs may vary significantly." The participants reflected that small, private, liberal arts colleges have historically perpetuated the reputation of being homogenous institutions made up of primarily middle to upper-class Caucasian students. They shared that those demographics have steadily evolved over the years. As a result of this shift in the student population, they feel it is their responsibility to make a focused attempt to engage these diverse and underrepresented students.

Each of the participants shared that their campus is now more diverse than ever before. They referenced institutional priorities highlighted by enrollment management plans that aim to continually increase the level of diversity in the student body. Their colleges are not only focused on recruiting diverse students, but more importantly retaining these individuals. Given their position as dean of students, each participant stressed the important role they play in establishing a safe and welcoming community for all students. Although all of the participants in this study were White, they each demonstrated a sincere commitment to establishing meaningful and sustained connections with historically underrepresented or marginalized students. Bryan mentioned that connecting with the underrepresented students at Laurel College, “is a huge part of my work these days.” He even shared that one day he had his family with him on campus for an event. One of his younger children naively questioned if he only talked to students of color. This comment initially caught Bryan by surprise, but served as an example of the intentional effort he takes to connect with underrepresented students. Too, Rebecca shared that she forms a personal connection with as many of these students as possible, “because there was a time when we didn’t support our historically underrepresented groups.” I believe this welcoming approach is influenced on some inherent level by their caring disposition.

Many of the participants revealed that students from underrepresented populations can be some of the most difficult students to reach on their campus. They reflected that based on their previous experiences, these students may be more hesitant to initially engage with administrators. In spite of some initial apprehension, according to these

participants they were able to make incredible strides in establishing connections with both individuals and groups of students from these subpopulations. Just as important as it was to develop bonds with key student leaders, a similar strategy applied to accessing diverse student groups. None of the participants used this exact terminology, but I interpreted their words as depicting gatekeepers in their communities. They needed to connect with influential student leaders from underrepresented populations who could provide them access greater numbers of students from their given culture or affiliation who may have otherwise been unreachable. Each participant made reference to intentionally cultivating relationships with key individuals from groups such as Black student unions, Hispanic organizations, and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning alliances.

Beth shared that she has intentionally made an effort to form several mentoring relationships with female students of color over the years. She explained that she truly wants these students to feel understood. She does not want them to feel, “underestimated or under considered” as a minoritized student at Hill College. Beth opened up and disclosed that she meets with one such student every other Saturday morning. This student is on the student government executive board and is also a member of a prominent Hispanic sorority. The two of them go out to breakfast and then proceed to the salon to get their nails manicured. When prompted, Beth explained that she initiated this relationship because she wants to work with the student so she realizes her potential. She shared that this student will often ask her questions about life, dating, and most often career advice. The way Beth spoke about their bond it seemed as if it was like that of a

mother and a daughter. We were fortunate enough to cross paths with this student in the dining hall during our campus tour. It was insightful to see Beth's facial expression when she looked at this student. The meaningful connection they shared was clearly visible from across the room. Beth ran over and gave her a hug and quickly introduced me to her and exclaimed, "she is one of our best students here at Hill."

The participants also mentioned that the equity concerns and social justice movements of the past several years have impacted their campus communities. Marcy reflected that she is particularly focused on resolving bias related incidents that unfortunately occur at Fox College. Rebecca shared that she recently took a proactive approach and coordinated an evening meeting that she attended with the chief of police and the Black Student Union. She explained that it was important for her to arrange such a meeting to improve relations on her campus. This subcategory will conclude with one final story from Bryan.

The latter portion of my stationary interview with Bryan was highlighted by an incident that took place during one of the nationally-televised racially-fueled demonstrations that occurred not far from Laurel College's campus a few years ago. Bryan described that his campus is normally known for a high level of student activism. This was also a time when many students of color were taking increasingly visible steps to self-advocate through the national social justice movement. His underrepresented students and their allies organized a march from the campus to the nearby downtown area. Bryan was alerted that other activity taking place in the vicinity garnered significant police response. Bryan wound up following this group of students in his car

and proceeded to call the police department to advocate on their behalf. He recalled the conversation with the police dispatcher and begged, “these are students. I’m here with them. Please don’t harm them. Please don’t do anything to them.” Thankfully the students eventually made their way back to campus unharmed with Bryan following just behind in his Volkswagen.

The students continued their protests on Laurel College’s campus throughout the week. They eventually presented a list of demands to the administration on Friday afternoon. Bryan’s president was traveling out of town that weekend, so he was the most senior leader on campus. Bryan made the decision to meet the students outside of the administrative building before they could make their way inside. He read their entire list of demands out loud in front of the group. As he shared this next part, he became visibly emotional,

Then I broke down. I started crying in front of them...really because I was incredibly proud of them. That was interesting and I think that really, really threw them...big time. They did not expect me to cry. I didn’t expect to cry either. We shared a really important moment.

Bryan went on to reflect that he was proud of the students because to him it was all about them finding their voice. He continued, “ultimately, what we do here is help students find their voice, and that’s what they did.”

Summary. The participants in this study articulated a variety of ways they intentionally develop connections with specific members of the student body. They strategically seek out ways to build rapport and establish trust with influential student

leaders. The students highlighted in this category play an influential role in the overall campus community. Through these relationships with leaders, participants were also able to expand their network to reach other members of key student organizations. Extending further, participants find that they spend an increasing amount of time nurturing relationships with diverse and underrepresented student populations that are rapidly expanding on their campuses. All of these strategic relationships helped deans to better understand and connect with their complex student communities.

Revisiting Personas

Although the participants in this study share many experiences and approach their role in a similar fashion, they are nevertheless six distinct individuals. They also work with different students at their own unique college campus. The participants recounted memories that given the specific context, could not be duplicated anywhere else. As insightful as it was to examine these occurrences across participants, it is vital for me to remember that their experiences are their own. I am honored to have spent time with them and value the thoughts and emotions they shared. The dean of student profiles and corresponding personas that open this chapter are my interpretations of each participant based on the information they shared and the activities that I observed. I ascribed these personas in an effort to help readers become familiar with and better understand each participant. Although they are unique individuals, each one of them can embody aspects of a mayor, a celebrity, an executive, an everyday family man, a campus mom, and an athlete.

Chapter Five

This study explored the experiences of deans of students and their development of meaningful and sustained connections with undergraduate students at small, private, liberal arts colleges. The following chapter provides an interpretation and discussion of the categorical findings that were detailed in the previous chapter. Prior research and theoretical concepts that guided this inquiry are revisited to provide context to the analysis. Implications of this study are presented for both student affairs practitioners at liberal arts colleges and the higher education scholarly community. The chapter concludes with recommendations for future research.

Positionality and Research Questions

My personal experiences as an undergraduate student at a small, private, liberal arts college served as the driving force for this research study. The meaningful and sustained connection that I was fortunate to develop with my own dean of students had a tremendous influence on both my professional career and a scholarly interest. My personal connection provided the initial inspiration for this topic of inquiry. I wanted to gain a deeper understanding of this type of connection that develops on a small, private, liberal arts college campus, beyond my own experience. Further investigation on deans of students and liberal arts colleges uncovered a significant gap in the scholarly literature. I felt that my personal interest paired with the lack of knowledge in this area justified my

exploration of this research topic. I believe this research study contributes to the growing body of knowledge that is now an area of increased interest for other higher education scholars. Throughout the duration of this study, I was able to connect and learn from other doctoral students with a shared interest in better understanding the experiences of deans of students at small, private, liberal arts colleges. Their scholarly curiosity was also influenced by their own undergraduate experiences. My specific interest in the meaningful and sustained connections deans develop with undergraduate students appeared to be a unique niche. My personal experiences and scholarly interest contributed to the approach and design of this study.

This research project utilized a case study design to explore the phenomenon of deans of students developing connections with undergraduate students at small, private, liberal arts colleges. There were two overarching research questions that directed this inquiry:

- 1- How and under what context does a dean of students develop meaningful and sustained connections with undergraduate students at a small, private, liberal arts college?
- 2- What are the benefits of the meaningful and sustained connections between deans of students and undergraduate students? What are the benefits to the institution? What are the benefits to students?

The first research question produced knowledge in two core areas. Initially, it provided contextual insight regarding previous personal experiences and current institutional factors that influenced the development of connections with students. The

participants' own personal history, specifically their pedigree as liberal arts college graduates, previous connections with their dean of students, and their former involvement and student leadership influenced their motivation to develop connections with students in their current role as dean of students. Additionally, there are current institutional factors that impact participants' capacity to connect with students. The influence of the institution's president and involvement on their leadership cabinet along with the complex duality of the vice president and dean of students roles impacted participants' ability to interact with students. The second aspect of the initial research question provided knowledge in relation to how deans are able to develop meaningful and sustained connections. There were significant personal attributes and characteristics uncovered that are consistent amongst each of the participants. These qualities highlighted the natural disposition and developed traits that help to explain how deans are able to successfully initiate rapport with students in the community. The participants also provided insight on how they intentionally develop connections with specific student leaders and organizations, along with underrepresented and diverse populations. These deliberate actions allow deans to better understand the student body and address their unique needs.

I was able to apply the knowledge that I gathered from the first research question to answer the second research question. The insight shared by the participants, coupled with my interpretation of the meaning allowed me to explain the benefits of the meaningful and sustained connections between deans of students and undergraduate students. Imbedded in the sections that follow, are the benefits these connections have on

individual students, along with the institution as a whole. Prior research and theoretical concepts that guided this inquiry relate to the knowledge uncovered in this study. I analyzed these topics in the discussion section and further address the importance of these meaningful and sustained connections along with the subsequent benefits in the implications section.

Discussion

I conducted an intrinsic, single case, multisite case study to understand the meaningful and sustained connections that deans of students develop with undergraduate students at small, private, liberal arts colleges. I completed site visits with six participants at their respective college campus. A series of stationary and mobile interviews, along with observations, document review, reflective exercises, and member check conversations contributed to the robust collection of data used for analysis. Concepts that emerged from the iterative data collection and analysis process depict the interrelated nature of the categorical findings. I revisit components of the literature discussed in Chapter Two and apply them to better understand the findings of this study, which were presented in the previous chapter. The following section incorporates aspects of both research questions for a discussion that explores the interpretation of findings across all participants.

Personal history. It is no surprise that each participants' previously lived experiences contributed to the development of meaningful and sustained connections with students at their current institution. It was insightful for me as a researcher to explore their personal journey as undergraduate students. Learning about their previous

college experiences provided a window that allowed me to access memories of influential moments during a pivotal time in their life. Many of these earlier experiences impacted their approach in their current roles as deans of students.

Before I visited participants, I was able to gather biographical information which was readily available on their institution's website and other professional networking indexes. I was not surprised to learn that almost all of the participants were graduates of small, private, liberal arts colleges. Throughout our exchanges, participants raved about their experiences at these small schools. They believed their positive experiences were a direct result of their environment and the corresponding campus culture. Participants explained how the liberal arts college environment helped them develop as a young adult and shaped them into the person they are today. They highlighted the value of the deep sense of community, the holistic liberal arts education, and frequent interactions with faculty and administration. The distinct benefits they described are consistent with the findings of Astin (1999), Hersh (1999), Hu and Kuh (2002), and Pascarella et al. (2004).

I believe that the participants in this study were inspired and compelled to return to this familiar and growth producing environment as they continued their career in higher education. Hirt et al. (2004) and Pascarella et al. (2004) noted that liberal arts colleges are known for their intimate campus environment, which creates a psychological size that fosters a supportive social-psychological context for community members. I developed a strong sense of participants' desire to give back to students in a similar fashion based upon their own positive connections to the liberal arts college experience. I theorize that future dean of students positions at small, private liberal arts colleges will

continually be filled by alumni from similar institutions. I feel that a major influence on my participants' desire to return to a small college is based on the impact of their dean of students.

Astin (1999) and Kezar (2003) noted the prevalence of influential relationships between students and administrators at liberal arts colleges. A majority of the participants clearly articulated a positive relationship with their dean of students while they were in college. A participant's previous bond with their dean of students proved to be an important factor in their desire to develop their own meaningful and sustained connections with students. These individuals had a profound impact on the dean each of the participants has become today. Rogers' (1962) research on interpersonal relationships can be applied to understand the connection shared between a dean and an undergraduate student.

Roger's (1962) believed that high quality encounters had the most significant influence on the effectiveness of interpersonal relationships. These positive connections consequently contribute to individual student development and ultimately success. Rogers' (1962) theory highlighted the significance of mutually-beneficial interpersonal relationships. Using this concept, both the dean and the student benefit from the connection. I believe the dean's main benefit is a heightened understanding of student needs and experiences in their community. As a result of this increased awareness, deans become more empathetic and therefore able to better serve additional students in the future. The dean may also learn how to challenge students in the future to expand their growth. The student in turn can develop a positive regard for the dean, which strengthens

both the dean and student's affinity for the college. As the connection continues to grow, so does the student's development. Furthermore, this positive relationship can have a ripple effect. This experience can lead to a student sharing the benefits of their connection to the dean with their peers. As a result, it increases the likelihood that additional students will be open to connecting with their dean. A dean's ability to form new student connections based on word-of-mouth communication and espoused reputation amongst the student body was uncovered in this study. It appeared that the participants even attempted to model their previous connection with their dean to the students they currently work with in the present time. The benefits based on Rogers' (1962) interpersonal relationship research will be revisited in following sections.

All of the participants in this study detailed the significance that their undergraduate involvement and student leadership played in their professional development. Their extracurricular experiences helped them establish a sense of identity, meaning, and purpose on their college campuses. It also provided them with practical opportunities to learn about the field of student affairs. Hersh (1999) emphasized holistic development as the hallmark of the liberal arts college experience, which encompasses growth in not only academic knowledge, but also in civility, identity, meaning, and purpose. Participants' involvement as undergraduates also contributed to their increased connections with their dean of students and other key administrative role models. Astin's (1984) student involvement theory positioned that increased campus involvement and interaction with faculty and staff results in higher levels of student learning and personal development. It is highly possible to believe that the participants might not have ended

up working as deans of students in the field of student affairs had they not been so involved and connected to influential mentors during their undergraduate careers. Crisp and Cruz (2009), Luna and Cullen (1995), and Roberts (2000) highlighted the benefits of mentoring relationships between college students and staff on career and personal development. The participants are undoubtedly serving as that type of mentor as evidenced by the student I interacted with at Bryan's Mobile Dean event. This student articulated the direct influence Bryan had on his personal development and aspirations to serve as a dean of students in the future. The insight from this first categorical finding supports the idea that participants' personal history, and more specifically their experiences during their college years, influences the meaningful and sustained connections they develop with undergraduate students. This finding also demonstrates the benefits these connections have on students as well. The next finding addresses institutional factors that affect participants' opportunity to interact with students.

Institutional factors. The second finding uncovered in the previous chapter illuminated the influence of the president and their executive cabinet on the dean's ability to develop connections with students. The finding also noted the complex professional responsibilities expected of participants based on their dual appointment as both vice president and dean of students. These two factors combined affected participants' capacity to connect with students. Being closely connected to the president and holding two positions simultaneously created both advantages and disadvantages for participants.

Each of the participants shared it was vital for them to be in close communication with the president of the college on a routine basis. This proximity maximized their

ability to incorporate the student experience in all aspects of decisions that would be made by the president and executive cabinet. It was essential for participants to hold this type of power so they could best advocate for the needs of the students. They also had a direct avenue to educate their president on the evolving needs expressed by the students and the common challenges encountered by their respective college community. This type of guidance is exemplified by transformational leadership (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978). The participants were focused on addressing the changes needed at their institution. They were also expected to be visionary and strategically-minded for their institutions. These two qualities are synonymous with transformational leadership (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978). In addition to the institutional-wide positive influence they were able to have on the executive cabinet level, participants' constant focus on strategic initiatives also had an adverse effect on their ability to connect with students.

Participants detailed the complexity of their dualistic role serving as both dean of students and vice president of student affairs. As dean of students they are charged with oversight of the student experience outside of the classroom and overall student welfare. The strategic demands of the vice president role will often separate them from that direct service to students. In most cases, participants reported that the vice presidential responsibilities decrease their time to connect directly with students. I could sense a level of frustration and possibly even disappointment in most of the participants when we discussed the evolution of their connection with students. They clearly understood that my research was focused on the connections developed between a dean and undergraduate students and articulated enjoyment and even a sense of satisfaction in

regards to connecting with students throughout their career. It seemed inevitable that as their responsibilities increased and titles expanded, their opportunity to form connections with students was altered. Fortunately, interactions with students are not nonexistent, rather they are less common than when they were only serving in a dean of students capacity.

Altman and Taylor's (1973) Social Penetration Theory emphasized both the breadth and depth of interpersonal relationships in that both the frequency and quality of interactions between two individuals impacts the development of the relationship. It appears that the participants still have high quality interactions with students, but their executive leadership responsibilities limit the frequency of those engagements. The participants are constantly caught up in a never-ending balancing act between the demands of the two roles. I conceptualized it as one individual completing the work of two people. This not only impacts the quantity, but also the type of work and the contrary skill sets. Janus the Roman god of beginnings, endings, transitions, and duality can serve as a symbolic representation for the experiences of the participants. They are constantly expected to act and respond in the present, while also planning for the future. Based on the way participants spoke about the rigors of their dualistic appointments, that comparison seems fair and accurate. I speculate that the constant desire to find and maintain balance may ultimately be unattainable given the complex demands of both positions.

It would be difficult for me to land on a definitive conclusion regarding if the dean of students and vice president positions should be shared by one individual or

separated between two people. The views of my participants were essentially inconclusive. Several felt strongly that the two positions should be separated and detailed the challenges they routinely face. Others adamantly defended the dual appointment and highlighted the advantages it affords them. I would have to agree with Bryan that the decision should be based upon the portfolio and expectations of the student affairs division at the given institution. I feel it would be irresponsible to assume that I could make a blanket decision that would be appropriate for every single liberal arts college. I firmly believe that different institutions have varied organizational cultures and therefore diverse needs. The dean of students and vice president dilemma can be symbolized by the yin and yang. The two roles are interconnected, and at times their associated responsibilities are contrary, but they ultimately have a complementary mission to serve undergraduate students.

Attributes and characteristics. The third finding illuminated the attributes and characteristics common amongst participants that assist them in developing connections with students. This finding highlighted both innate qualities and learned traits that influence a dean of student's interpersonal relationships. These concepts link the disposition and approach of the participants to the fundamental focus of this research study, developing connections with students. These attributes and characteristics helped me to understand the humanistic aspects of those individuals who are drawn to serve in the dean of students position. Much of the knowledge I gained from this finding was shared during interviews and in written reflections. Additionally, the campus tour

provided first-hand observations in relation to Rogers' (1962) interpersonal relationship development and Altman and Taylor's (1973) Social Penetration Theory.

The participants in this study stressed the importance of students knowing that they care about their well-being and academic success. This view is supported by Bouchard's (2014) study that found students at liberal arts colleges expressed a strong desire to receive care and support from their dean of students. The power of participants demonstrating that they care the first time they interact with a new student can have a significant influence on their chances of developing a meaningful and sustained connection with that student. Roger's (1962) noted the importance of the initial encounter on positive interpersonal relationship development. Several of the participants shared how they attempt to leave a favorable impression on both students and their parents at major transition events including new student orientation and during move-in day. Many of the participants recalled giving speeches and engaging in individual conversations with families in hopes of expressing their care and concern for students. They shared stories of how many of the brief interactions evolved into meaningful and sustained connections over the years. It is important for deans of students to always keep in mind the power of a first impression.

An overall focus on care and concern for others resonates with many of the leadership models presented in the literature review. Bolman and Gallos' (2011) frame depicting the leader as a servant emphasized that care is the main form of currency in this leadership style. Greenleaf (1970) and Northouse (2013) noted that servant leadership is based on how a leader treats others, and most importantly putting the needs of followers

first. Many students, especially those who recently transitioned to college, can benefit from a compassionate leader who can guide them on how to successfully navigate college life and intervene as needed. Servant leadership and strong interpersonal relationship development is dependent upon authentic, face-to-face, high-quality interactions (Greenleaf, 1970; Northouse, 2013; Rogers, 1962). Rebecca's persona of the campus mom at North College exemplifies Bollman and Gallos' (2011) symbolism of a college community as an extended family. Caring and compassionate deans of students can play a pivotal role in the lives and development of many students in that extended family.

Another aspect of the third finding uncovered the importance of deans being approachable to students. Many of the participants highlighted a variety of ways they strive to remain relatable to students in an effort to help foster connections. They noted the advantage of elevated levels of self-confidence and charisma in relation to connecting with students. This type of persona exemplifies qualities of transformational leaders (Burns, 1978; Northouse, 2013). Participants shared strategies such as using students' names whenever possible and being mindful of how their clothing may impact their approachability. The participants were willing to engage community members on a personal level and modify appearance to attract and inspire students. They stressed the importance of making an effort to not only learn about students, but to also share their own background and personal information with those they serve. Altman and Taylor (1973) used the layers of an onion to symbolize the transcendence from a superficial relationship to a more significant connection. A major part of that development is dependent upon finding commonalities and reciprocal sharing. This type of progression

to a more meaningful relationship can benefit students. If students feel like they are understood and also have an enhanced level of comfort with their dean, they could be more likely to approach their dean in a time of need. This heightened level of comfort would signify the various layers that were uncovered to permit such a meaningful connection between the two individuals. Students collaborating with their dean of students during a challenge or crisis would increase their likelihood of being connected to valuable campus resources and other support services.

Accessibility is another valuable characteristic that helped participants develop connections with students. Many of the participants explained ways they intentionally make themselves available to students on a frequent basis. Purposeful engagement with community members for the common good is another distinctive feature of transformational leadership (Burns, 1978; Northouse, 2013). Participants knew they could assist students if they were easily at their disposal. Bandura's (1997) research on self-efficacy noted the power of an individual's belief that acting in certain ways can produce desired outcomes and how that subsequently impacts motivation. Participants believed that if they were accessible, they would be more likely to assist students. In turn, if they are able to assist a student, then they could also be more highly motivated to sustain that interaction and develop it into a more meaningful connection. The motivation to develop intentional connections aligns with Altman and Taylor's (1973) Social Penetration Theory as it relates to the nature of rewards associated with interactions. These types of interactions are mutually-beneficially to both parties. Deans are validated because they feel like their time and effort was useful, and the student

ultimately received the attention or guidance they desired. Participants shared that their intentional efforts to develop connections often extended to specific student leaders, organizations, and diverse and underrepresented populations.

Aspects of this categorical finding inspired me to reflect back to the historical depictions of the earliest deans in higher education. Nidiffer (2000) and Schwartz's (2010) coverage of the deans of men and women highlighted the importance of their care and concern for college students and the subsequent influence it had on their development and overall experience. These men and women laid the foundation for the growth of the profession and have a lasting impact on the way many deans approach their role today. I believe that the participants in this study preserve the legacy of those deans who served before them. I consider my participants to be symbolic living relics of the deans of men and women from the early twentieth century. They embody favorable attributes and characteristics that have historical significance and survived from an earlier time. Pearson's (1998) altruist archetype described a caring and compassionate individual who is dedicated to the success of others. I believe this archetype is an accurate depiction of the participants' commitment to both undergraduate students and their institutions.

Intentionally developed connections. The fourth finding uncovered the intentional connections that participants nurtured with specific members of the community. Participants strategically sought out ways to build rapport and establish trust with student leaders and other influential students in the community. These initial connections also opened channels for further networking with key student organizations,

along with diverse and underrepresented populations. This final finding shifted the focus to the deliberate efforts that participants put forth to establish calculated and goal-oriented connections with specific students.

Participants noted that it was essential for them reach certain student leaders in the student body each year. They were cognizant that these specific connections would help them best serve the community at large. Engaging with presidents from student government, Greek life, and multicultural groups allowed participants to have their finger on the pulse of the student community. Participants were able to get a better sense of relevant concerns and successes of the student body at large through their connections with student leaders. The ability to build effective rapport with these leaders depended heavily on the establishment of trust. Rogers (1962) and Altman and Taylor (1973) emphasized the crucial role that trust plays in the development of meaningful interpersonal relationships. Moreover, the foundation of both servant and transformational leadership styles are built upon a leader being able to establish a strong sense of trust in their given community of followers (Burns, 1978; Greenleaf, 1970; Northouse, 2013). The development of such trust does not happen quickly, rather it occurs over an extended period of time. This type of trust must permeate the campus and requires the leader to engage with others in a meaningful way. The goal would be to enhance the motivation of not only like-minded individuals, but also those with dissimilar views so they can address the needs of the community together.

The ability to develop strong connections with student leaders is a repetitive and ongoing process. Deans would not be as successful if they only put in the effort to

develop the relationship once the student was elected to position of power and influence. Rather, the dean would be in an optimal position if that sense of trust was established earlier on in the student's career, and then the relationship could be further nurtured in a more deliberate way. This strategy relates back to Rogers' (1962) focus on a high-quality first encounter. It also fulfills Altman and Taylors' (1973) process of pulling back the layers of the onion to establish both breadth and depth to enhance the connection. The shared benefits to both dean and student would come to fruition. As Bouchard (2014) found, care and support from the dean of students at a small liberal arts college resulted in student leaders feeling heard and experiencing advocacy from the administration. This could also lead to students increasing their own self-efficacy. The dean would be like an orchestra conductor, creating opportunities for students to reach their potential or encouraging them to generate their own opportunities. This connection would then put the dean in a better position to reach other members of the community.

Participants in this study shared the importance of connecting with diverse and underrepresented populations of students at their respective campuses. A dean of students can offer a significant amount of care and support to previously marginalized groups of students. All of the participants spoke openly about the deliberate attempts they made over the past several years to build up strong relationships with both individuals and groups of students from multicultural backgrounds and those with diverse identities. That type of interpersonal investment can mean a great deal for a dean trying to foster mutual respect and trust in a group of students who may be wary of administration. This type of connection was exemplified on a personal level by Beth

mentoring the female student through their series of Saturday morning breakfast conversations. On a broader scale, Bryan's dedication and emotional moment with student activists on his campus made a lasting impression on a large group of students.

Transformational leaders can cultivate and empower those who may have otherwise been overlooked (Kezar et al., 2006). From a social justice perspective, it is a dean of students' responsibility as a transformational leader to develop relationships with all community members, especially those who were previously disenfranchised (Aguirre & Martinez, 2006). As many liberal arts colleges employ calculated enrollment management plans, a dean of students can have a significant impact on persistence and retention by developing meaningful and sustained connections with students from underrepresented populations (Flanagan, 2006; Hagedorn, 2012; Kuh et al., 1991; Tinto, 2005). Increased levels of persistence and retention of students from diverse backgrounds would have a three-fold benefit. Initially, the students would be more likely to complete their degrees and transition on to employment and graduate education opportunities. The institution would benefit by having a more diverse student population that actively contributes to the learning community. Additionally, it would challenge more students to learn what being just means in today's complex society.

Implications

This study explored the experiences of deans of students at small, private, liberal arts colleges in relation to the meaningful and sustained connections they develop with undergraduate students. The primary impact of this study is its contribution to the small, but growing body of literature that focuses specifically on deans of students at liberal arts

colleges. The findings of this study are applicable to aspiring deans of students and graduate training programs. The implications can provide developing practitioners with valuable insight based on the previously-lived experiences of six deans of students to inform their approach and philosophy. Furthermore, the implications can inform senior-leaders so they can better understand the vital role a dean of students fulfills on a small, private, liberal arts college campus.

This research study shines a light on the experiences of student affairs professionals who hold a specific position in a unique higher education environment. Scholarly research on the experiences of senior-leaders at liberal arts colleges is an area of study that continually requires additional attention. There were a limited number of recently published research studies that were related to the focus of my study (Bouchard, 2014; Clark, 2017; Enke, 2011). The authors of these doctoral dissertations each repeatedly encouraged future scholars to direct their attention to deans of students at the liberal arts college. This call to action was previously raised by Hirt et al. (2004) and Tederman (1997). I believe that my research study responded to their call and makes a relevant contribution to the scholarly literature on the experiences of deans of students at liberal arts colleges. Up until this point, most of the literature on the deans of students and the connections they develop with students at liberal arts colleges was mainly anecdotal in nature. The findings of in this study are based on empirical research and are significant to administrators and students at the approximately 130 liberal arts colleges in the United States (Baker & Baldwin, 2014).

My study found that a majority of the participants were highly-involved student leaders that graduated from small, private, liberal arts colleges. This finding suggests that those who aspire to and eventually serve as deans of students at liberal arts colleges are products of this exact college environment. It is almost as if there is a legacy or lineage that connects liberal arts graduates and the dean of students position at these institutions. I encourage current deans of students at liberal arts colleges to develop or expand formal student affairs mentoring programs at their respective institutions. The participants of this study shared stories regarding how they informally mentored students who expressed an interest in the field of student affairs, but no one seemed to be involved in a more structured program tailored for groups of students. Many of the peers from my student affairs master's program attended large, public, research institutions as undergraduate students and they were exposed to such mentoring programs and formally connected to various administrators. Bouchard (2014) found that student leaders at small colleges learn important communication and leadership skills from direct interaction with their dean of students. Many of the participants in my study noted being inspired by their dean of students when they were in college. I believe that current deans of students at small colleges could cultivate and mentor future student affairs professionals in a more formalized way. My recommendation extends into master's level student affairs programs.

Clark's (2017) research focused on the professional competencies of deans of students at liberal arts colleges. She found that deans believed their role has increased in complexity over the years and participants were not well-versed in many of competencies

recommended by student affairs professional organizations (Clark, 2017). Clark (2017) found that many participants' time and attention was being taken away from traditional student advocacy work and focused on other strategic responsibilities. These findings align with the my second categorical finding. I support Clark's (2017) recommendation that graduate preparation programs should offer curriculum that focuses on the small college experience and the multitude of responsibilities that are now expected of dean of students. Those who aspire to serve as deans of students at small colleges need to be better informed of these professional expectations. Professional development opportunities can extend beyond graduate education programs.

Enger (2011) noted that many senior-leaders at liberal arts colleges indicated that mentors were not readily available to them as they advanced their careers. I believe that formalized mentoring programs should be expanded so there can be a specific focus on mid-level professionals working at liberal arts colleges. Student affairs professional organizations like ACPA and NASPA host mid-level administrator trainings and conferences, but these offerings are not tailored to the unique environment and culture of liberal arts colleges. I envision professional development offerings organized specifically for liberal arts college staff through professional organizations at regional and national conferences. There is also an opportunity for deans of students within consortiums to collaborate and establish mentoring programs. Many of the schools in the Landmark and Memorial Conferences from this study are within a reasonable distance of each other. Student affairs professionals from within these consortiums occasionally do connect, but should consider establishing formalized mentoring relationships to advance the

profession and cultivate aspiring deans of students at small, liberal arts colleges. These programs would be incredibly valuable, especially given the trend that many small colleges hire individuals to serve as both the deans of students and vice president. Beth, one of the participants from this study, expressed a desire to establish a training program for promising student affairs professionals focused on advancing their careers in the liberal arts college environment. She believed that such a program would help rising professionals be better prepared for the complexities of the dual appointment of the dean of students and vice president.

This study also raised the debate on the dual appointment of a dean of students and vice president at liberal arts colleges. The participants in this study were split in terms of their thoughts on if the positions should continue to be coupled or if they should be separated and filled by two separate individuals. Bass (2006) raised a similar discussion over a decade ago and questioned if it were possible for one person to handle all of this work. I think it is pertinent for scholars and professionals to continue having these same discussions as this study uncovered how the dual appointment could impact connections with students. Most of the participants revealed that their opportunity to develop connections with students has dwindled as more is being asked of them in their vice presidential role. If this trend continues, those holding dual appointments will be forced to rely on other staff members to develop connections with students. I believe that on some level, the dual appointment has an adverse effect on the fundamental aspect of the dean of students position, student advocacy and direct engagement with the student body.

Several of the participants in this study noted they are engaged in discussions about the dual appointment conundrum with their presidents and executive cabinet members. They also shared that they are informally engaging in conversation about this same topic with their colleagues at colleges across the country. Given the complexity of this situation, I would encourage individuals who apply and interview for deans of students positions at liberal arts colleges to make this a prominent point of discussion in their on-campus interviews. Applicants should reflect and think deeply about their motivation and more so, their capacity to handle both positions. This study reinforces the question if one person is truly capable of developing meaningful and sustained connections with students while simultaneously being tasked with complex strategic initiatives that inherently remove the individual from everyday student interactions.

The findings of this study also have implications for how aspiring deans of students develop their own personal approach and philosophy for interacting with students. This study confirms the importance of a caring disposition, along with being approachable and accessible to undergraduate students. Aspiring professionals need to make sure they are mindful of these attributes and characteristics years before they are even in a position to be considered for the dean of students role. Student affairs professionals need to develop their own level of comfort and self-efficacy in relation to engaging with student to ensure they are prepared for the responsibilities required of a dean of students. Student advocacy is still at the core of the work of a dean of students. Many of the participants in this study noted the rise in crisis response and mental health concerns on their campuses. Current and future deans need to develop competency

responding to these types of incidents and also the subsequent interactions with parents that commonly correspond with such incidents. Deans also need to make a clear distinction that although they may exhibit many positive qualities that are similar to those of a parent, they actually serve a different purpose. Based on my professional experience and insight from working in student affairs for over a decade, I believe many students transition to college looking for an influence in their life that differs from what they experience with their parents. Deans of students need to maintain consistent exposure to students and not relegate themselves to the metaphorical ivory towers of seclusion. In order for deans of students to develop connections with students it is imperative for them to be present and visible to students. Based on the commentary of my participants, it is almost an expectation that an accessible dean of student would routinely engage with students at athletic games, campus activities, and events hosted by student organizations. Another implication relates to which students have access to the dean of students.

The participants shared their growing emphasis on building connections with underrepresented students. It is vital for future deans to make this type of effort standard in their practice. A recent study found that private liberal arts colleges were less diverse than other institutions in regards to the racial and socio-economic backgrounds of their students (Times Higher Education, 2017). Students from these populations should not be an afterthought, but rather a continued area of focus. This is even more important given the student persistence and retention implications (Hagedorn, 2012; Kuh et al., 1991; Tinto, 2005). Marginalized students could arguably benefit the most from being closely connected to their dean of students. A 2015 study found that first-generation and low-

income students at liberal arts colleges graduated at a higher rate and in less time as compared to those at public research universities (The Council of Independent Colleges, 2015). This data supports the powerful impact of a liberal arts education and the importance of access to such an experience. I encourage institutional leaders to continue to explore and create new pathways that would allow increased numbers of underrepresented populations access to a liberal arts education. Specific scholarships directly for underrepresented students named in honor of a current or former dean of students could be established through philanthropic efforts. This is a prominent need given all of the recent social justice concerns on college campuses after changes in federal legislation regarding citizenship and immigration. Now more than ever, many minoritized students feel less comfortable given the uncertainty of their eligibility to pursue a college education. These students need a champion and a strong advocate for their access to a dynamic liberal arts education. They also deserve to have access to some of the fantastic deans of students that are currently making a tremendous impact on the lives of many college students at liberal arts colleges.

Although all of the participants in this study have their own life story and aspects of their identity that make them unique, they are all White. It would be encouraging to see more racial diversity in senior-leaders at liberal arts colleges, especially those in a position like a dean of students or vice president of student affairs. If that were the case, it could decrease the likelihood that a dean would have to make an intentional effort to connect with minoritized students, as this may happen organically or may even be initiated by the student. Many college campuses aspire to have their faculty and staff

mirror the identities of the student population. Enger (2011) suggested that an increase in non-White and non-heterosexual senior-leaders would influence the perceived balance of power at liberal arts colleges. It would be a powerful force for a minoritized student to see a part of their identity represented in their dean of students.

Recommendations for Future Research

The literature referenced in this study highlighted the lack of research centered on administrators at liberal arts colleges (Bouchard, 2014; Clark, 2017; Enke, 2011; Hirt et al., 2004; Tederman, 1997). This study demonstrated the need for deeper exploration of the various factors that influence the development of connections between deans of students and undergraduate students at these institutions. Further investigation could lead to a more comprehensive understanding of the benefits these connections have on both students and the college. Although this study generated increased knowledge and illuminated key aspects of the phenomenon, further exploration is warranted. My recommendations for future research studies follows.

Additional qualitative research studies could produce valuable insight about the connections developed between deans and undergraduate students. In this study my intention was to understand the experiences almost exclusively from the dean's perspective. I think it would be fascinating to better understand this phenomenon from the student perspective as well. This study could be modified by replacing the dean and instead employ students as participants. It would be illuminating to investigate what similarities and differences might be uncovered by changing the lens of the inquiry. Alternatively, a study could be designed that would incorporate both student and dean

simultaneously. Morgan, Eliot, Lowe, and Gorman (2016) encouraged the use of dyadic interviews, which is an increasingly popular method for qualitative inquiry. Dyadic interviews produce data through conversations between two individuals (Morgan et al., 2016). Like focus groups, dyadic interviews incorporate participant interaction into the interview experience and promotes sharing and comparing (Morgan, 1996). This type of data collection technique would be an extension of some of the interpersonal experiences observed during the mobile campus tour.

Another avenue of inquiry would be to design a study with an increased focus on unique characteristics of the environment. This study introduced some of the noteworthy aspects of both a liberal arts education and the liberal arts college environment. A further examination specifically focused on the sense of campus culture experienced at these institutions could generate useful knowledge for leaders at these institutions. Many of the participants in this study referenced aspects of their unique campus culture and how it impacted their ability to develop connections with students. Given the scope of my study, further examination of the impact of campus culture could uncover meaningful findings.

The second categorical finding of this study uncovered aspects that related to participants holding both the dean of students and vice president positions. My initial research design did not include this dynamic as a selection criterion for participants. This combination of roles was uncovered after I determined my selection criteria. I found that this duality had both supportive and adverse implications on participants' ability to develop connections with students. A study intentionally designed to further explore the

complexity of holding both the dean of students and vice president positions would be insightful given the national trend of this combination being implemented at many liberal arts colleges. Alternatively, a similar case study could be designed to explore the connections developed with students for those individuals who hold only the dean of students position and not the vice presidential role at liberal arts colleges. It would be interesting to see if their experiences are similar or different from individuals who hold both positions given the demands of the vice presidential responsibilities. These types of studies could provide further understanding of the implications of holding one or both positions at the liberal arts college.

Additional research could be conducted to explore some of the implications noted in the previous section. A study designed to target a more diverse group of participants who hold the dean of students title at liberal arts colleges would make valuable contributions to the literature available to the scholarly community. In order to facilitate such an inquiry, the boundaries of this case study could be expanded along with the selection criteria for participants. In a similar vein, a study could focus specifically on the meaningful and sustained connections deans of students develop with underrepresented students. This study highlighted the importance of these relationships given the context of the increasingly more diverse student demographics at liberal arts colleges as evidenced by the participants. Research studies of this nature could allow an investigator to conduct a more critically-focused inquiry.

My final recommendation brings the focus back to the increased need for empirical studies to be conducted on administrators working at liberal arts colleges. I am

encouraged by some of the recent doctoral dissertation studies that have either already been defended or those that are in progress. Some of my peers who are completing their degree programs at institutions across the country share an interest in better understanding the experiences of deans of students at small, private, liberal arts colleges. In 2006, the scholarly journal, *New Directions for Student Services*, published a special edition focused specifically on liberal arts colleges. Now over 12 years later, a follow-up edition with a similar focus could serve as a valuable resource to practitioners at small colleges and the higher education and student affairs scholarly community at large.

Summary

This chapter covered an analysis of the categorical findings that illuminate how and under what context a dean of students develops meaningful and sustained connections with undergraduate students at a small, private, liberal arts college. The benefits these connections can have on both undergraduate students and the institution was woven into this commentary. My positionality as a qualitative researcher was revisited to frame the research questions that guided this intrinsic case study. Categorical findings were synthesized to demonstrate their interrelated nature and how as a whole they influence the connections that participants developed with students. The findings uncovered the impact of participants' previous history as college students, current institutional factors, attributes and characteristics, and intentionally developed connections. Research and theoretical concepts that informed this inquiry were integrated into the discussion section to fortify the significance of this study. Implications for aspiring deans of students and liberal arts colleges were also presented.

This chapter concluded with a call for additional research to be conducted so that scholars can add to the small body of literature on this topic. Recommendations for further exploration were proposed to help guide future researchers interested in exploring the experiences of deans of students at small, private, liberal arts colleges.

Appendix A

IRB Approval Letter



Office of Research Development, Integrity, and Assurance

Research Hall, 4400 University Drive, MS 6D5, Fairfax, Virginia 22030
Phone: 703-993-5445; Fax: 703-993-9590

DATE: August 11, 2017

TO: Jan Arminio
FROM: George Mason University IRB

Project Title: [1110427-1] A Case Study of Dean of Students at Small, Private, Liberal Arts Colleges and their Connections with Students

SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: APPROVED
APPROVAL DATE: August 11, 2017
EXPIRATION DATE: August 10, 2018
REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

REVIEW TYPE: Expedited review category #7

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The George Mason University IRB has APPROVED your submission. This submission has received Expedited Review based on applicable federal regulations.

Please remember that all research must be conducted as described in the submitted materials.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form unless the IRB has waived the requirement for a signature on the consent form or has waived the requirement for a consent process. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by the IRB prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to the IRB office. Please use the appropriate reporting forms for this procedure. All FDA and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed (if applicable).

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to the IRB.

The anniversary date of this study is August 10, 2018. This project requires continuing review by this committee on an annual basis. You may not collect data beyond this date without prior IRB approval.

Appendix B

Informed Consent Form

IRBNet ID: 1110427-1
Principle Investigator: Dr. Jan Arminio
Co-Investigator: John Cicchetti

A Case Study of Dean of Students at Small, Private, Liberal Arts Colleges and their Connections with Students

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

RESEARCH PROCEDURES: This research is being conducted to explore the experiences of deans of students at small, private, liberal arts colleges and to gain a deeper understanding of individuals holding the current dean of students position. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to take part in a 60-minute individual stationary (seated) interview and a 30 to 60-minute campus tour observation. Participants will be asked to write two or three brief journal reflections (30 to 60 minutes total time to complete all reflections) based on emergent categories from the data collected from the campus interviews. Journal reflection content would be exchanged over email. Document review (publically-available material) and artifact review will be incorporated into the study with the participant's permission. Lastly, the researcher would conduct follow up member check conversations with participants to discuss initial findings. These conversations could occur over the phone, via email, or in-person depending on each participant's individual availability and would take approximately 15 to 30 minutes total. All in-person interviews will be audio recorded. The digital audio files will be password protected and secured in a locked office. Only the researchers will have access to the data, which will be destroyed after a period of five years.

RISKS: There are no more than minimal risks for participating in this research. You may skip over questions you do not feel like answering or withdraw from the study at any time.

BENEFITS: The possible benefits to you include self-knowledge, reflection, giving voice to the experience, and a greater understanding of the experiences of deans of students.

CONFIDENTIALITY: The data in this study will be confidential. Your name, identity, and home institution's name will not be directly connected with any materials associated with this study. There is an inherent possibility that someone may recognize you through the use of direct quotations and details of your responses. Only the researchers will have access to the data and your identity will be concealed by use of a pseudonym. Names and other identifiers will not be included on transcriptions. Recordings and transcriptions from the interview will be kept in a secure location at all times and electronic data will be password protected. While it is understood that no computer transmission can be perfectly secure, reasonable efforts will be made to protect the confidentiality of your transmission. All data will be stored for a minimum of five years. After five years all electronic audio files will be permanently deleted and paper copies will be shredded.

PARTICIPATION: Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason. If you decide not to participate or if you withdraw from the study, there is no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. There are no costs to you or any other party.

CONTACT: This research is being conducted by John Cicchetti in the College of Education and Human Development at George Mason University. He may be reached at 484-678-9043 or jjcicche2@gmu.edu for questions or to report a research-related problem. You may also contact the faculty advisor, Dr. Jan Arminio, at 703-993-2064 or jarminio@gmu.edu. You may contact George Mason University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) Office at 703-993-4121 if you have questions or comments regarding your rights as a participant in the research.

This research has been reviewed according to George Mason University procedures governing your participation in this research.

CONSENT: I have read this form, all of my questions have been answered by the research staff, and I agree to participate in this study.

_____ I agree to audio taping. _____ I do not agree to audio taping.

Participant Signature

Date of Signature



Project Number: 1110427-1
Date Approved: 8/11/17
Approval Expiration Date: 8/10/18

IRB: For Official Use Only

Page 1 of 1

Appendix C

Interview Protocol

IRBNet ID: 1110427-1

Principle Investigator: Dr. Jan Arminio

Co-Investigator: John Cicchetti

Interview Protocol

Establishing Rapport

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me for this research study. Let me first describe the project and then if you are still willing to participate I will need you to sign a consent form. Let me stress that you do not need to answer any questions that you don't want to and that you can end the interview at any time. The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of deans of students at small, private, liberal arts colleges and gain a deeper understanding of individuals holding the current dean of students position. Do you have any questions about that?

[Share consent form. Read important parts of it. Obtain participant's signature.]

Tell me what a good day looks like for you as a Dean of Students?

Tell me about your professional experience in higher education. How did you end up working at this institution?

Tell me about your current work position and a brief summary of your duties?

Tell me about your college experience. Where and what did you study?

Do you have any memories of your dean of students? Did you have any interactions with your dean of students?

What does the title “dean of students” mean to you? How would you describe your role to someone unfamiliar with the position?

What is your approach to working with students as the dean?

What characteristics/factors/qualities contribute to you being able to make a meaningful personal connection with a student?

What are the environmental or institutional influences that impact your ability to develop relationships with students?

Tell me any strategies that you developed that help you connect and build relationships with students?

What challenges do you face when trying to make connections with students?

What percentage of current students do you feel you know by name? How do you feel students are comfortable approaching you with questions or concerns? Which students are comfortable approaching you?

Please tell me some memorable interactions you’ve had with students during your service as a dean of students.

Are there one or two students that come to mind as having the most profound impact on your career as a dean of students? Please tell me about those relationships/interactions.

Describe the person you are now and how you might be different from when first started your career as a dean of students.

What do you wish you had known before you took up the role of dean of students?

Closing

What advice would you offer to those interested in pursuing the dean of students role?

What else do you think is important for me to know that we have not yet discussed?

Thank you very much for your time here today. I appreciate your insight.

Appendix D

Participant Journal Reflection Exercise

Participant Journal Reflection Exercise

Cicchetti Research Study- IRBNetID: 1110427-1

11/14/2017

Name:

Gender: (optional)

Age: (optional)

Reflection Responses: Please reflect and share your thoughts to the following four prompts. You are welcome to write as much as you wish. I understand the demands of your schedule and I know your time is valuable. I do not have any expectation regarding the length of your responses. Please feel free to express yourself as you wish.

1-What did my visit and our conversation prompt you to think about after I left your campus?

2-What has been your greatest insight from connecting with students?

3-How are you a better professional because of your connections to students?

4-Imagine you were tasked with creating a brand new small, private, liberal arts college. Would you choose to appoint one individual to both the Vice President of Student Affairs and Dean of Students positions or would you separate those positions and hire two individuals? Please describe your choice based on your own personal experiences and insight. How might your decision impact connections with students?

Appendix E

Participant and Site Chart

| Dean | Gender | Tenure as Dean | Highest Degree Earned | College | Enrollment | Selectivity | Charter | Student to Faculty Ratio | Yearly Cost of Attendance |
|-------------|---------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------|----------------|-------------------|--------------------|----------------|-----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| Ethel | Female | 26 | Doctorate | Adams | 2,400 | More selective | 1830s | 9:1 | \$65,000 |
| Marcy | Female | 21 | Master's | Fox | 1,600 | More selective | 1860s | 11:1 | \$63,000 |
| Beth | Female | 11 | Master's | Hill | 1,600 | Selective | 1860s | 10:1 | \$53,000 |
| Bryan | Male | 6 | Doctorate | Laurel | 1,500 | Selective | 1880s | 10:1 | \$56,000 |
| Rebecca | Female | 10 | Doctorate | North | 2,000 | Selective | 1740s | 12:1 | \$55,000 |
| Jill | Female | 5 | Master's | Spring | 2,300 | More Selective | 1780s | 9:1 | \$68,000 |

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Biography

John Cicchetti graduated from Bishop Shanahan High School in Downingtown, Pennsylvania in 2000. He received his Bachelor of Science in Psychology from Ursinus College in 2004. He received his Master of Education in Higher Education and Student Affairs from the University of South Carolina in 2009. John has worked at both private and public institutions in student affairs at Rider University, the University of South Carolina, Villanova University, and George Mason University.