

How Students Make Meaning of their Intentional

Out-of-class Educational

Experiences

by

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ABSTRACT

Many students spend a significant portion of their college life outside of the classroom, yet very little is known about the learning they experience as a result of their interactions outside of the classroom. Intentional out-of-class educational experiences offer educators a powerful window into not only understanding the college student experience, but gaining insight into what students are learning that has meaning for them. This research study employed a qualitative approach to examine how students make meaning of their intentional out-of-class educational experiences at a small, Catholic, liberal arts college. Four recent graduates of the college were interviewed on two separate occasions to garner a broad picture of what they learned beyond their classrooms. All four participants were members of the college's honor society whose membership criteria included not only excellence in the classroom, but excellence in the out-of-class arena as well. The students represented athletic teams, honor societies, service societies and clubs in their out-of-class educational experiences. While the participants discussed an array of outcomes as a result of their out-of-class educational experiences, each participant identified specific events that lead them to make new or revised meaning from their internal and external understandings of their world. Labeled as *turning points*, this research study found that there was a powerful interaction when combining out-of-class educational experiences with the opportunity to cognitively reflect on what each student was experiencing both in understanding how they viewed themselves, as well as the world around them. Consequently, student affairs practitioners, at least in this campus setting, can

routinely discover cognitive gains of students implementing opportunities for college students to reflect on out-of-class educational experiences.

DEDICATION

To my parents, Barb and George, who always believed I was smart even when I didn't. Thank you for never letting me quit.

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THE STUDY

Introduction

“All you want and even more!” This is a billboard tag-line suggested by Molly, a student participant in this qualitative study that examined how students make meaning of their intentional out-of-class educational experiences. Higher education institutions and organizations have invested enormous resources in the study of the college student learning experience which has resulted in a plethora of discourse and research. What students should learn, what they actually learn, where they learn it, how they learn it, and what they can do with what they have learned represent some of the issues of the student learning puzzle.

Even with existing research contributing to the discussion (Astin, 1993; Gellin, 2003; Kuh, 1995; Kuh, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 1991; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt & Associates, 2005; Love, 1995; Baxter Magolda, 1992; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005; Terenzini, Pascarella & Blimling, 1996), many questions remain unexplored. One of the areas of the student learning experience that has received minimal scholarly exploration is student learning that results from intentional, out-of-class educational experiences as defined by programs, events, and services designed to stimulate a learning response from students typically associated with desired institutional student learning outcomes. In other words, programming and activities with a measurable purpose. This research project will attempt to lessen this gap in the literature.

Building on the foundational work of Astin (1984, 1996) defining the quality of the student experience, the National Survey of Student Engagement

(NSSE) represents a massive data collection machine “designed to obtain, on an annual basis, information from scores of colleges and universities nationwide about student participation in programs and activities that institutions provide for their learning and personal development” (NSSE, 2006). This massive dataset has permitted inter-institutional comparisons at local, regional and national levels, and has yielded empirically confirmed "good practices" in undergraduate education, specifically, behaviors by students and institutions associated with desired outcomes of college (NSSE, 2006). However, what is missing from the NSSE data is information on the impact of out-of-class learning typically associated with student affairs divisions (Dungy, 2004; Love, 1995). Likewise, Pascarella and Terenzini (1991, 2005) have produced two substantial volumes of research chronicling the college student experience with minimal reference to research documenting traditional learning experiences and outcomes. What research that does exist typically focuses on one aspect or participation area of out-of-class educational experiences.

Three circumstances exist that make this study relevant. First, the higher education community has experienced pressure for documented success (i.e. increased GPAs, retention, and graduation rates) from an array of constituents. Accrediting agencies are requiring colleges and universities to examine what students are learning by means that exceed the traditional assessment measures of papers and exams. Governments are requiring increasing levels of accountability through avenues such as the *Spellings Commission*. Professional organizations are urging members to meet the calls of stakeholders to avoid imposed national

standards. Presidents and college leaders are turning to local practitioners to collect, analyze, and interpret data for use in decision-making protocols. Practitioners on local campuses are left with little time, training or the resources necessary to meet the demands of these stakeholders. This study looks beyond traditional measures to discover what students learn on their campuses, specifically through their intentional, out-of-class educational experiences. The second contextual issue lies in the call for purposeful data collection. Assessment has come to hold a dominant place in higher education. Educators are challenged with creating and implementing comprehensive assessment plans that range from course-level to campus-wide assessments. New dialogs, paradigms, and a new profession have emerged around assessment. However, little research exists on this push for assessment (Doyle, 2004; Green, Jones & Aloï, 2008). Furthermore, there is a lack of research regarding student learning outside the traditional learning venue, the classroom (ACPA & NASPA, 2004). This is perhaps due to the continued division between academic affairs and student affairs (Love & Estanek, 2004), with little importance placed on out-of-class educational experiences.

The third contributing factor centers on the convergence of advancements in the technical capabilities of research, broadening acceptance of postmodern approaches, and the emerging interest in the out-of-class experience on student learning by practitioners (Keeling, 2006; Kuh, 1995). As researchers, faculty, and staff recognize that learning occurs throughout the campus, measures of learning are expanding beyond grade point averages (GPA) and standardized test

scores (Keeling, 2006; Love, 1995). The learning outcomes movement has allowed for new measures of student learning that include skills, concepts, and abilities not limited to classroom learning (Keeling, 2006). The American College Personnel Association (ACPA) has engaged in a multiple-step project, partnering with additional professional organizations to produce guides to help student affairs personnel learn about and apply student learning outcomes to the co-curricular context. Student affairs practitioners now have a way to measure learning outside the classroom rather than being limited to traditional development areas such as psycho-social development. As described by Jane Fried in *Learning Reconsidered 2* (Keeling, 2006), the time has come to pay attention to “our role as learning facilitators,” and to develop “the language to describe what we are doing in teaching/learning terminology” (p. 9).

Statement of the Problem

Putting together large puzzles is a challenge for most people. Often, corner pieces are sought first, followed by the straight lined edges, leaving the center pieces for last. The meticulous completion of the puzzle, piece by piece, results in a pleasurable reward, the emerging picture, and ultimately the gratification of a job well done. However, if one or more puzzle pieces are missing, the results are incomplete and less pleasurable.

Even after 400 years of college experiences in the United States, the college student learning puzzle has missing pieces that limit our interpretation of the puzzle, as well as how the puzzle pieces fits together. The corner pieces of traditional measures of learning have stood the test of time and are now being

supported by the research on student involvement (Astin, 1993), engagement (Kuh, 1995), and specific academic initiatives such as First Year Experience (FYE) and learning communities. There are even some pieces from research on subgroups such as residential students, athletes, Greeks, and members of student governments. However, other pieces are still missing. These pieces center on the student experience that occur out-of-class on subject matter not tied to any specific course or program of study. This reach study specifically targets intentional out of class learning experiences. These are typically structured activities that students participate in such as athletics, clubs, and service organizations.

The American College Personnel Association (ACPA) and the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA), the foremost student affairs professional organizations, have called on practitioners to focus on student learning through three recently published documents: *The Student Learning Imperative (SLI)* (ACPA, 1996), *Learning Reconsidered (LR)* (ACPA & NASPA, 2004), and *Learning Reconsidered 2 (LR2)* (Keeling, 2006). However, most of the literature centers on discussions of learning outcomes. Little scholarly research currently exists that explores learning outside the classroom (Love, 1995). Most of the existing research continues to target program and functional areas within student affairs such as residence life (Inman & Pascarella, 1997; Pike, Schroeder, & Berry 1997), specific groups such as first generation students (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak & Terenzini, 2004), application of student development theory such as Chickering's vectors (Foubert & Grainger, 2006),

and leadership identity development (Komivies, et al, 2005). Rather than relying upon frameworks of outcomes and best practices, scholars such as Love (1995) have called for scholarly research into student learning experiences beyond the classroom. This research project attempts to meet this call by discovering what students are learning out of the classroom that is meaningful to them in a more holistic approach.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to provide a new lens for understanding the student learning picture by focusing specifically on students' intentional out of the classroom learning experiences to move beyond traditional ways of understanding learning contexts explicitly tied to the classroom. It is crucial to understand that this study does not attempt to usurp traditional classroom learning, but to challenge readers to think about learning a broader context.

According to Love and Estanek (2004), higher education is plagued by holding on to old paradigms grounded in Newtonian science from over a century ago. This dominant worldview limits thinking to "either-or" approaches to experiences. Under this paradigm, learning has predominately been tied to the classroom and course content (Kuh, 1995). Higher education has been slow to move beyond this traditional thinking. Love and Estanek argue that new science, based in quantum physics, has produced a new paradigm, one that does not replace but co-exists with the Newtonian worldview. Simply stated, this new paradigm represents "both/and" rather than "either/or" thinking (Love & Estanek, 2004) which opens the door to exploring intentional students' learning

experiences outside of the classroom without dismantling existing research or practice. Rather than maintaining the view that student learning occurs in one or another location, this new paradigm allows for student learning which occurs in multiple locations and contexts as a result of a diverse array of experiences.

Significance of the Study

Patricia M. King states "the central mission of higher education is to enhance learning" (quoted in Komivies, Woodard & Associates, 1996, p. 218). However, many pieces of the puzzle of the student learning experience have yet to be understood as indicated in the American Association for Higher Education's (AAHE)¹ 2002 research agenda that included 224 sets of questions for consideration in research on student learning (AAHE, 2002). This research study provides a framework for student affairs scholar practitioners to gain insight into questions related to the college student experience outside of the classroom. In addition, this research will serve to offset the lack of literature associated with learning experiences not directly linked to the classroom (Terenzini, Pascarella & Blimling, 1996) or a specific program in student affairs. Specifically, this research project will guide student affairs scholar practitioners in their interactions with students to create more opportunities for learning in existing programs. Additionally, this project will contribute to the on-going process within the student affairs profession to redesign programs and experiences for students that directly target attainment of desired learning outcomes.

¹ This organization is now known as the American Association of Higher Education and Accreditation (AAHEA).

Learning Reconsidered (ACPA & NASPA, 2004) presents student affairs practitioners with several recommendations this research can address, such as advancing the creation and attainment of student learning outcomes within the functional area of the student affairs domain rather than in terms of supporting the academic functions of a college. Furthermore, this research project will contribute to the body of literature exploring student learning by exploring students' voices as they share their holistic learning experiences beyond classroom measures of learning.

As previously mentioned, in their work *Rethinking Student Affairs Practice*, Love and Estanek (2004) describe two paradigms which currently exist in higher education through analogies to scientific paradigms of Newtonian Science and "New Science." The old or Newtonian view values dividing concepts into parts. The view of functional silos of academic affairs and student affairs represents an example of this paradigm in higher education; conversely, the "New Science" paradigm values "both/and" thinking or multiple dualisms. A more fluid approach to leadership and student learning is represented by this view as it applies to higher education. This study will contribute to advancing this new paradigm by advocating the expansion of the role of the student affairs professionals from program directors to educators partnered with faculty, with whom they are jointly responsible and accountable for student learning. Such a shift in thinking and practice can be a slow process. This project will provide further insight into transforming the function of student affairs professionals to learning experience experts. Hopefully, insights gained from this study will lead

to improvements in decision-making that impacts students, who do not necessarily view learning during college as compartmentalized silos: “students just call it college” (Keeling, 2006, p. vii).

Limitations of the Study

Ragin (1987; in Creswell, 1998) defines the focus of a qualitative study as working with a few cases including many variables, as contrasted to quantitative research that works with few variables and many cases. This research study involved a small number of students affiliated with one institution which restricts the ability to make broad generalizations. Additional limitations are discussed in Chapter 6.

Conceptual Map

This research project documents the experiences of four student participants in terms of how they make meaning of their out-of-class educational experiences. Each chapter provides an overview and explanation of specific phases in the research process. Chapter Two provides the context for the research to map out the development of student learning outside of the classroom. The research procedures are chronicled in Chapter Three, including a rationale for selecting a qualitative approach to explore the research questions; qualitative description is overviewed as well. The participants’ experiences are detailed in Chapter Four, while the reflections of the researcher are presented in Chapter five. Chapter Six serves to bring the research full circle with the existing literature through a discussion of how the findings fit with or further explain how students

are making meaning of their learning experiences. This chapter concludes with recommendations for practice and suggestions for further research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

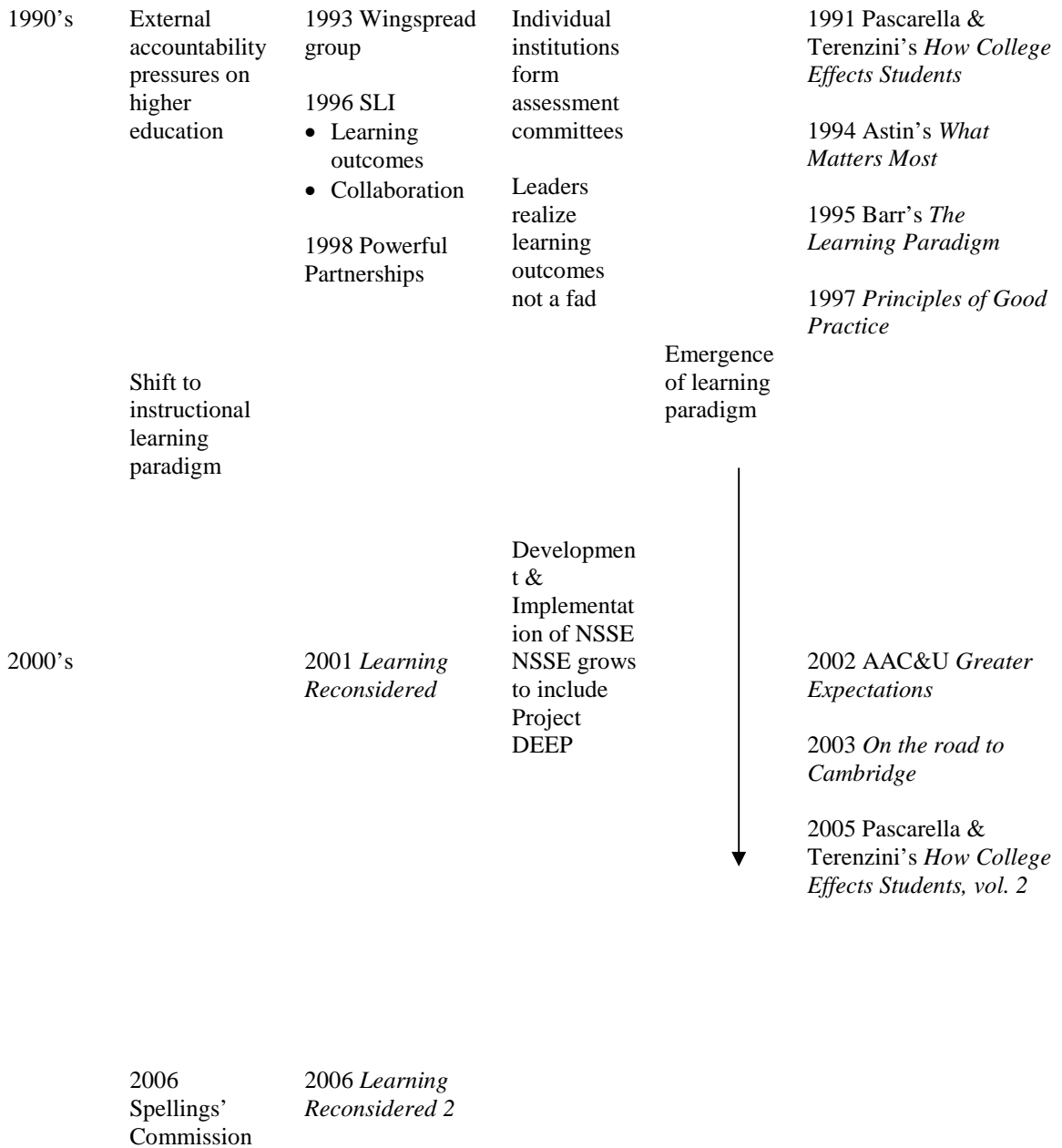
As is common in qualitative designs, literature reviews are used to frame the study (Creswell, 2003). The focus of this research study was on a snapshot of student learning outside of the classroom. As a result, this literature review focuses on weaving together the development of the student affairs profession, the progression of student learning, and the assessment movement to better understand the phenomenon under investigation. This chapter will review applicable literature documenting the emergence of student learning outcomes in student affairs and situate the concept of *meaning making* and *transformative education* within this context in higher education. Table 1 illustrates the highlights of this integrated evolution. The knowledge framed by this chapter will later serve to locate the emerging theory within the literature as part of the discussion generated by this study in Chapter 6.

Table 1

Role of Student Learning in Student Affairs

	Student Affairs Shifts	Student Affairs foundational documents	Assessment movement	Student learning developments	Significant works
1890-1900	Advent of student personnel dean & the personnel “worker				
1930’s	Holistic learning	1937 SPPV		Foundations of learning theory and application building	
1940’s		1947 SPVV Update			

1950s	Increased access Emergence of “personnel division Early “dean of students”			
1960’s	Shift away from personnel work to student affairs practice		Beginning research of assessment and evaluation	
1970’s	Shift away from <i>in loco parentis</i>	1972 Return to the Academy & THE Project	Emergence of student assessment movement	<p>1973 Astin’s <i>Four Critical Years</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “value added” • Longitudinal studies <p>1979 Pace’s <i>Measuring the Outcomes of College</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Role of environment • Actual student behaviors
1980’s	Emergence of Vice President for Student Affairs		<p>1985 AAC report</p> <p>1988 1st national assessment conference</p>	Old measures of institutional success inadequate



The Evolution of the Student Affairs Profession

Most of the literature in higher education has focused on student learning in the classroom; little attention has been paid to researching student learning outside of the classroom exclusive of exploring specific structured learning programs. Perhaps this is due in part to the recent emergence of student affairs as

a profession explicitly linked to student learning. To understand how student learning has emerged as a paramount task of student affairs, it is important to understand how the profession developed.

The origins of the modern student affairs profession began with the emergence of the role of dean. Barr, Desler & Associates (2000) identify the first dean and student personnel worker as LeBaron Russell Briggs, who began his tenure as “Dean of Men” at Harvard in 1890. During the early years of the profession, the job descriptions of deans remained largely ambiguous. However the primary duties focused on assisting students transitioning to college life as well as targeting holistic education (Barr, Desler & Associates, 2000). Deans of Women faced similarly vague job descriptions. However, they had the additional task of combating the prejudice surrounding the very attendance of women in colleges and universities. During this early period, discipline and moral education were added to the umbrella of the expanding role of the dean, although specific job functions varied from institution to institution as there was little standardization of the profession during this time.

The dawning of the Great Depression spawned the need for vocational guidance in America’s colleges and Universities (Barr, Desler & Associates, 2000). The emergence of the “personnel” worker represents the other developmental track that served to create the profession of student affairs. Walter Dill Scott is credited with being the first “personnel” worker (Barr, Desler & Associates, 2000). Scott was a physiologist from Northwestern University who developed a measure to classify employees that was adapted for use by the Army

during World War I. Naturally, when Scott was appointed President at Northwestern in 1919, he brought this classification system to the University to intentionally guide students into appropriate vocational fields. This opening allowed for the application of other measures such as aptitude testing that had become a standard tool in the military. This marks the beginning of applying standard measures to services offered in student affairs. Additionally, the career service focus is one of the functions that has remained under the auspiciousness of the modern student affairs unit in many colleges and universities.

Following World War II, the GI bill ignited the first access revolution requiring the expansion of both classroom and non-classroom services to accommodate the diversity within the flood of new students (Schroeder & Pike, 2001). During the 50's and 60's, there was a change in role of the chief student affairs office from deans of men, women or "personnel" to the "Dean of Students." At the same time, the student affairs functional division was formally charged with meeting student needs outside of the classroom, which laid the groundwork for the role of dean of students to develop into the Vice President for Student Affairs (Barr, Desler & Associates, 2000). In addition, institutions began to shift their student support services from a moral focus to a larger umbrella of services. Additional positions were added to the growing student services arsenal including mental health services and support for academically associated ventures such as orientation, placement and admissions (Mueller, 1961, as cited in Manning, Kinzie & Schuh, 2006). Student affairs professionals were beginning to work as partners with faculty in promoting learning.

The turbulent 60's were, of course, a time of change. Manning, Kinzie and Schuh (2006) summarize the social conditions that helped to establish the student affairs unit as a necessary and permanent division in higher education:

Divisions of student affairs were created, perhaps in part because the issues of the day were complex and exhausting. Among them were students' feeling disaffected by the increasing size and complexity of their institutions (Thelin, 2004), civil rights (Rhatigan, 2000), issues of free speech (Caple, 1998), the Vietnam War (Thelin, 2004), and a series of court cases that challenged the position that institutions stood *in loco parentis* in their relationships with students (Caple, 1998, pp. 8-9).

One of the important legal shifts that began to change student affairs practice was the dismantling of *in loco parentis*. From the inception of the early "deans" in student affairs, there was a sense that college students needed guidance and boundaries. Prior to college, that guidance was provided by parents and local agents such as churches. As young men and women went off to college, the firm hand that once controlled their behavior was no longer present. The idea of *in loco parentis* was not just a discipline concept. As Barr, Desler and Associates (2000) describe it, "here we pay homage to the centuries-old idea of *alma mater*, a nurturing mother, portraying the institution as a living thing, a place where relationships are deep and abiding" (p. 4). However, as the student population began to diversify, in age due to the G.I. Bill, the adoption of a lower age of majority, and greater access to enrollment, the idea of the college acting as a substitute parent began to wane (Kaplin & Lee, 1997). Students were now

viewed as adults, able to be independent from their parents, responsible for their self-regulation and the consequences that came with their right to make decisions. New federal laws and guidelines, such as the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) have formally defined the relationship between parents, students and institutions that has resulted in changes in practices such as a student's right to privacy from parents in terms of grades and discipline reports.

The decades of the last part of the twentieth century seem to mark the maturing of the profession although it continues to possess diversity in function and form. Shaped from necessity and unassigned functions, the student affairs profession has morphed into a complex and growing field that includes service providers, managers, educators, researchers and scholar practitioners. The modern student affairs division is an amalgamation of services such as career development, housing, judicial affairs, student life, student activities, mental and physical health services, multicultural and diversity affairs, veteran affairs, advising, and student success to name a few. However, there is not a standard model of a student affairs unit, as each institution has defined the service areas needed to meet individual campus needs. The increasing sophistication of services provided, the emergence of professional degrees in the field, and the rise of professional organizations guiding theory and practice in meeting student needs as well as joining in the learning dialog have been pillars in the development of the profession.

Foundational Papers

As the profession began to formalize and organize in the early part of the twentieth century, philosophical papers began to emerge documenting and guiding practice. While learning has always been at the core of the student affairs field (Miller, 1996), the central documents of the student affairs profession shed light on the role of the modern student affairs unit and the environmental changes that have occurred over the last century. Table 2 provides a brief overview of the documents reviewed in this section.

Table 2

Student Affairs Documents

Document	SSPV	Return to Academy	SLI	Good Practice	Powerful Partnerships	LR & LR2
Decade	1930's	1970's	1990's	1990's	1990's	2000's
Role of SA Staff	Instructional	Behavioral scientists & academicians	Educator	Educator	Educational partners	Equal partners
Learning Focus	Holistic	Shift from extracurricular to academics	Seamless	Active student learning	Holistic	Transformational learning
Learning Content	Personal development	Development to education	Learning and development intertwined	Learning and development intertwined	Learning and development intertwined	Whole student learning Importance of out-of-classroom learning
Other themes		Assessment measures for accountability		Systematic inquiry	Accountable for learning	Identifying and achieving learning outcomes

The Student Personnel Point of View (SPPV), crafted in 1937 (American Council on Education, 1937) as a philosophical document, represents the foundation of the student affairs profession (Schroeder & Pike, 2001). Born out of a decade of data collected about students, “this landmark report recognized the

proud lineage of higher education's commitment to 'the preservation, transmission, and enrichment of the important elements of culture' that is produced in the forms of 'scholarship, research, creative imagination, and human experience'" (American Council on Education, 1937, p. 67). This document challenged higher education to incorporate personal and professional development as student outcomes in addition to scholarship and research (Evans, Forney & Guido-DiBrito, 1998). The SPPV frames the function of student affairs with three primary planks:

1. Colleges and universities should strive for holistic education rather than cognitive and intellectual education alone,
2. Student personnel workers should assume a role in instructional improvement, and
3. Empirically grounded research should guide decisions and actions within the profession (Evans & Reason, 2001).

Although constructed during the infancy of the profession, these elements remain at the core of the functions and philosophy of the student affairs profession as evidenced in proceeding professional documents. Additionally, the SSPV began to conceptually identify the role of the student affairs professional as an integral influence in student learning; however, the learning content focused on student personal development (Miller, 1996) and career preparation. The SSPV remained the preeminent philosophical document for decades.

In the early 1970's , the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) initiated Tomorrow's Higher Education Project (T.H.E.), with Robert Brown as

the chief architect (Evans, Forney & Guido-DiBrito, 1998). T.H.E.'s, *Student Development in Tomorrow's Higher Education – A Return to the Academy* (Brown, 1972), once again emphasized the dual areas of development central to higher education: the cognitive and the affective (Evans & Reason, 2001). *A Return to the Academy* offered guidance for the role of student affairs divisions and professionals. For example, Brown called on student affairs divisions to:

1. Shift attention from extracurricular activities to academics;
2. Collaborate with faculty to improve teaching and learning experiences for students;
3. Reorganize offices and functions to reflect the centrality of the mission of higher education;
4. Utilize student assessments for accountability to institutions, students and the public; and
5. Develop a new set of professional competencies (Evans, Forney & Guido-DiBrito, 1998; Evans & Reason, 2001).

In *A Return to the Academy* (1972), Brown challenged student affairs staff members to function as “behavioral scientists and academicians” (Miller, 1996, p. 244). Student affairs practitioners now had the foundation to work alongside the faculty in achieving the mission of higher education to produce educated individuals.

The closing decades of the last century saw student affairs divisions expanding their umbrella to meet the diverging needs of students as well as to respond to social conditions such as the impact of Title IX and economic

pressures (Manning, Kinzie, & Schuh, 2006). As accountability and accreditation began to play a dominant role in decision making, the profession accommodated a variety of functions and philosophies still evident today.

In 1993, ACPA once again gathered together a group of scholars who had ties with student affairs “to examine how student affairs educators could enhance student learning and personal development” (ACPA, 1996, p. 5). The culminating outcome of this group was the *Student Learning Imperative* (SLI) (ACPA, 1996). At the center of this document was student learning, identified by the SLI as the rightful primary goal of higher education (Evans & Reason, 2001). As a result, the SLI advocated that student affairs divisions should collaborate with faculty to create “seamless environments” of student learning (Evans & Reason, 2001) and develop a student learning orientation (ACPA, 1996). Additionally, the SLI identified the role of student affairs professionals as equal to educators, all striving to foster student learning (Schroeder, 1996).

Although the SLI “helped focus the conversation about higher education reform in student affairs” (Whitt & Blimling in Barr, Desler & Associates, 2000, p. 613), it did not provide a roadmap of how to practice within this student learning centered environment. *Principles of Good Practice in Student Affairs* (ACPA & NASPA, 1997) provided that roadmap by offering “unambiguous advice on the post product investment of time, energy, and resources of student affairs” (Whitt & Blimling in Barr, Desler & Associates, 2000, p. 614). The *Principles of Good Practice for Student Affairs* intentionally mirror Chickering and Gamson’s (1987) work in identifying good practices in undergraduate

education and were designed to be integrated into daily practice (ACPA & NASPA, 1997). Good practice for a student affairs include:

1. Engaging students in active learning.
2. Helping students develop coherent values and ethical standards.
3. Settings and communicates high expectations for student learning.
4. Using systematic inquiry to improve student and institutional performance.
5. Using resources effectively to achieve institutional missions and goals.
6. Forging educational partnerships that advance student learning.
7. Building supportive and inclusive communities. (ACPA & NASPA, 1997, p. 1).

As mentioned previously, *SLI* and *Principles of Good Practice for Student Affairs* were companion pieces designed for daily practice. Two studies explored the implementation of these philosophical documents, one taking a quantitative approach, and the other a qualitative framework.

Citing that no studies existed that documented the implementation of the concepts in the *SLI* and *Principles of Good Practice for Student Affairs*, Doyle (2004) used the inventories developed within the *Principles of Good Practice for Student Affairs* to survey chief student affairs officers (CSAOs) with the purpose of determining “the extent to which college and university student affairs divisions incorporated student learning as defined and expressed in the *Principles of Good Practices for Student Affairs* (ACPA & NASPA, 1997)” (Doyle, 2004, p. 377). Doyle sent a good practices survey to 216 CSAO’s from 4-year colleges

and universities with enrollments between 500-3,000. The sample was primarily random; however, Doyle purposefully selected nonrandom participants from the Council of Christian Colleges and Universities to reflect the diversity of institutional type.

Doyle's analysis yielded a hierarchy of implemented good practices: builds supportive and inclusive communities, helps students develop coherent values and ethical standards, engages students in active learning, forges educational partnership that advance student learning, sets and communicates high expectations for learning, uses resources effectively to achieve institutional mission, and uses systematic inquire to improve student and institutional performance, (Doyle, 2004, p. 381). Doyle concluded that the results reflected the historical values of the student affairs profession and that a weakness within the participating student affairs divisions was their management practices as defined in the study. Furthermore, Doyle proclaimed that "if student affairs wants not only to survive, but also to prosper, it must demonstrate to the rest of the institution that it holds itself accountable for achieving not only the division's mission, but also the institution's mission" (Doyle, 2004, p. 391).

Smith and Rodgers (2005) employed a case study approach on how the *SLI* and *Principles of Good Practice for Student Affairs* were "understood and utilized as guides to design and implement practice" (p. 472) within student affairs divisions of a southern, public, comprehensive university with a total enrollment of about 12,500 students. The participants in this case study consisted of 36 student affairs educators, three faculty members and the president. The student

affairs participants represented 10 departments including career services, counseling, financial aid, judicial affairs, student health, housing and residence life, recreational sports, student involvement and leadership, student life assessment, and student programs. Data was collected on five visits to the campus through semi-structured interviews, direct observations and document analysis

Smith and Rodgers (2005) found that the Senior Student Affairs Officer (SSAO) demonstrated the greatest understanding and applied practice of the *SLI* and *Best Practices*. A second staff member charged with divisional strategic planning was also found to possess in-depth understanding of these two documents. Among the rest of the staff, there were points of congruence with espoused values that paralleled the guiding documents; however, there was dissonance in applying the principles and values in daily practice.

Based on their research, Smith and Rodgers (2005) offered three recommendations crucial for the applied practice of the *SLI* and *Best Practices*. First, leadership, especially from the SSAO, is crucial to the application of the concepts and ideas outlined in the guiding documents. Second, divisions should establish a mutual set of core values and organizational ethos derived from the guiding documents. Finally, divisions should clarify the definition of “student centeredness” since the researchers found that different student affairs staff members possessed different understandings of that central concept.

The *SLI* and *Principles of Good Practices for Student Affairs* clearly indicate a paradigm shift in both student affairs and the academic arena, with a focus on

what students are learning. Additionally, the *SLI* and *Principles of Good Practices for Student Affairs* unmistakably identify the role of student affairs workers as educational partners working with other higher education constituencies to achieve the learning mission of institutions.

As the mantra of collaboration rang through the higher education arena, *Powerful Partnerships: A Shared Responsibility for Learning* (AAHE, ACPA, & NASPA, 1998) represents a philosophical unification of the functional silos of academic and student affairs (Evans & Reason, 2001). The *Powerful Partnerships* report echoes familiar themes such as the centrality of student holistic learning and accountability by identifying ten learning principles and collaborative actions (AAHE, ACPA, & NASPA, 1998).

Collaboration is great in theory but difficult to achieve across traditionally separated functional divisions, as indicated in the research project, “On the road to Cambridge” (Philpott & Strange, 2003). In this qualitative case study involving six participants from a Midwestern university, Philpott and Strange sought to gain insight into the dynamics of collaborations of two administrators, two faculty members, and two student affairs staff as they worked to create a holistic learning experience. Even though the group had agreed upon a theoretical framework during the planning phase, Philpott and Strange found that “although collaborators attempted to make seamless what had previously been disjointed, namely intellectual and social learning, their bonds to different but complementary professional cultures prevented them from achieving this goal outright” (2003, p. 91). As a result, Philpott and Strange concluded that before

true collaboration can be achieved, all partners need to become aware of their professional cultures and values, and how they impact daily practice.

These three foundational documents, the *SLI*, *Good Practice in Student Affairs*, and *Powerful Partnerships*, set the stage for emphasizing a student learning paradigm in the student affairs profession as well as a pattern of collaboration with faculty and other stakeholders in higher education. Likewise, the student learning assessment movement required student affairs professionals to learn the language and engage in the practice of assessing learning (Dungy, 2004). *Learning Reconsidered: A Campus-wide Focus on the Student Experience* (NASPA & ACPA, 2004) once again brought student learning to the conversational forefront. *Learning Reconsidered* challenges student affairs educators to remain true to the commitment of student affairs to focus on holistic student learning, to build partnerships and collaborative efforts with faculty, and to move toward identifying and achieving student learning outcomes (Dungy, 2004).

During the decade prior to the release of *Learning Reconsidered*, much of the research focused on student engagement. However, student affairs educators were largely left out of the research (Blimling, 2001; Dungy 2004). *Learning Reconsidered* continues to validate the importance of out-of-classroom learning and for “making transformative education possible and accessible for all students” (NASPA & ACPA, 2004, p. 1) by affirming that “student affairs, in this conceptualization, is integral to the learning process because of the opportunities it provides students to learn through action, contemplation, reflection and

emotional engagement as well as information acquisition” (NASPA & ACPA, 2004, p. 11). Very clearly, *Learning Reconsidered* equates student affairs professionals with faculty in terms of achieving academic and developmental learning outcomes.

Unlike the *SLI*, *Learning Reconsidered* not only provides a philosophical and value laden foundation, but offers a roadmap for achieving transformative education, “a holistic process of learning that places the student at the center of the learning experience” (NASPA & ACPA, 2004, p. 1). As *Learning Reconsidered* lays the foundations for student affairs professionals to become practitioners of student learning, its companion piece, *Learning Reconsidered 2: Implementing a Campus-wide Focus on the Student Experience* (Keeling, 2006), provides the strategies and examples for individual student affairs units to contribute to and measure student learning outside of the classroom. *Learning Reconsidered 2* represents a “how to” guide to encourage student affairs practitioners to gain the language and skills necessary to contribute to the learning and accountability culture prevalent in today’s higher education system.

This two volume roadmap contains very explicit suggestions for the structure and function of student affairs divisions, the skill set needed by professionals to be effective practitioners, and student learning outcomes for three types of campus contexts: academic, social and institutional. What is missing is the call for and application of research present in its predecessors, which has been replaced with the assessment of student learning.

The Emergence of Student Learning Outcomes in Student Affairs

Another important facet of this research investigation centers on understanding how learning outside of the classroom is traditionally measured. As long as higher education has existed, there has been some measure to gage student learning. Traditionally, most efforts involved measures such as GPA and SAT scores where content is defined and targeted through classroom teaching activities. Since most student affairs or out-of-class educational activities are not directly linked to course content, surveys on student satisfaction represent the dominate assessment effort to gage the student experience despite the century long urgency to focus on learning. Little direct evidence of student learning outside the classroom existed prior to the assessment movement, which encouraged the utilization of student learning outcomes as opposed to student satisfaction.

The call for focusing on general student learning and identifying outcomes is voiced throughout the foundational documents within the student affairs profession, but the uniform adoption as practice was spawned by the birth of the assessment movement. In *Building a Scholarship of Assessment* (Banta & Associates, 2002), Ewell notes that no specific date can be attributed to the origin of the assessment movement. However, several key events help to explain the growing momentum of the assessment movement that exploded by the 1980's. Several of these key events include:

- Student development assessment of attitudes and interests in the 1960's;
- The K-12 mastery movement;
- Development of national college student research at UCLA;

- The growing demand in the 1980's for public accountability with politicians demanding statewide assessment practices in public colleges and universities (Banta & Associates, 2002; Keeling, 2006).

The need for assessment within student affairs began to gain momentum in the 1980's with works such as *Serving More Than Students: A Critical Need for College Student Personnel Services* (Garland, 1985). In this monograph, Garland called student affairs professionals to:

- a) Assess the environment of the institution; b) become experts on students' expectations, needs, and interests and be able to articulate them to others in the institution; c) contribute to the quality of the academic experience; and d) be able to explain the goals of student affairs to others in the institution in terms that are meaningful to them (Schroeder & Pike, 2001, p. 345).

Perhaps the most forceful impetus spurring the learning assessment movement came from one article, *A New Paradigm for Understanding Education* by Robert Barr and John Tagg (1995). In this article, the authors describe a paradigm shift from the traditional instructional paradigm to a learning paradigm. They argue that the learning paradigm offers an alternative lens in which to view learning and the production of learning (Barr & Tagg, 1995). Although Barr and Tagg were addressing primarily the academic community in their article, the elements of their paradigm included ideas embedded in student affairs for almost a century such as: focus on learning and student-success outcomes, "student-

centered” holistic learning, and learning environments as cooperative, collaborative, and supportive (Barr & Tagg, 1995).

Similarly to their faculty colleagues, student affairs joined the student learning assessment cadre by employing assessment practices that required educating professionals in the development and implementation of assessment. Schuh and Upcraft’s two volume set, *Assessment in Student Affairs* (1996) and *Assessment Practice in Student Affairs* (2001) offered both experienced and novice assessment practitioners a plethora of processes and examples on which to base local assessment projects. The authors, discussing their second book, state, “this book is an attempt to continue the dialogue about assessment in student affairs and provide practitioners with even more practical tools to develop, and in many cases, conduct assessments” (Schuh & Upcraft, 2001, xii). More applied manuals and articles began to emerge through multiple media conduits such as the assessment column in NetResults, a NASPA e-magazine, that provides student affairs professionals with tips and rationales for conducting various assessments.

Paralleling the movement to incorporate assessment into the student affairs arena, the scholarly literature of assessment in student affairs began to accumulate in the late 1980’s and into the 1990’s consisting primarily of literature on practice focusing on what students do in class. The *SLI* (ACPA, 1996) and *Learning Reconsidered* (NASPA & ACPA, 2004) clearly call on student affairs to incorporate student learning outcomes and assessment practices. This enables those within the field to join in the conversation of student learning and to keep

holistic student learning in the forefront for faculty, administrators and student affairs staff (Bresciani, 2003; Schroeder & Pike, 2001).

Unfortunately, most of the literature is still divided between the functional silos of academic and student affairs (Hanson in Bresciani, 2003), or pertains to classroom learning or learning outcomes tied to course level outcomes. However, as the discussions of assessing student learning continue to expand to multiple contexts, student affairs practitioners are being invited into the dialog of student learning, thus opening the channel for new research to discover what is happening both inside and outside of the classroom.

Student Learning Applied to Student Affairs

Both the foundational documents of student affairs and the role of the student affairs scholar practitioner demand that professionals apply research that is applicable to student affairs. Student learning represents the primary function of higher education. However, student learning is no longer the sole domain of academic units (Bresciani, Zelna & Anderson, 2004). As mentioned earlier, the notion of student learning has developed into a concept broader than GPA or degree attainment. Rather than delving into the complex and overflowing body of literature surrounding learning theory, this study will discuss traditional student learning theories pertinent to the out-of-class experience such as cognitive and intellectual development, institutional conditions, and meaning making.

Traditionally, cognitive and intellectual development have been the focus of student learning research; up until recently psychosocial development has been the focus of research exploring gains from out-of-class educational experiences

traditionally associated with student affairs. In 1996, Terenzini, Pascarella and Blimling summarized the growing body of research tied to out-of-class experiences on learning. For the purposes of their research, Terenzini, Pascarella and Blimling defined learning as “a variety of academic or cognitive gains” (1996, p. 150). For their study, learning refers to “grade performance; various forms of academic, intellectual, or cognitive development, and changes in learning-related attitudes or values” (1996, p. 150). They explored student gains from living in residence halls, membership in fraternities and sororities, participating in intercollegiate athletics, on and off campus employment, participating in extracurricular activities, faculty interactions, and peer interactions. The purpose of this meta-analysis was twofold. First, the researchers wanted to “provide some sense of the extent to which those experiences, in fact, shape intellectual and cognitive growth” (Terenzini, Pascarella & Blimling, 1996, p. 157), and second, what facets of out-of-class experience “have some potential to enhance student learning” (Terenzini, Pascarella & Blimling, 1996, p. 157). Most of the studies they analyzed yielded mixed results for the direct impact of out-of-class educational experiences on cognitive development, especially when viewed as single variables or experiences, confirming that learning is a holistic endeavor. Terenzini, Pascarella and Blimling identified six conclusions about the impact of out-of-class experiences on student cognitive development:

1. Student' out-of-class experiences appear to be far more influential in students' academic and intellectual development than many faculty members and academic and student affairs administrators' think.
2. Not all-out-of class activities exert a positive influence on student learning.
3. Student affairs programs may not be capitalizing on the potential of students' out-of-class experiences to enhance student learning.
4. In virtually all cases where students' out-of-class experiences were found to enhance academic or cognitive learning, those experiences required, or at least afforded opportunities for, active student involvement
5. The most powerful source of influence on student learning appears to be students' interpersonal interactions, whether with peer or faculty (and, one suspects, staff members).
6. The learning impacts of students' out-of-class experiences are probably cumulative rather than catalytic (Terenzini, Pascarella & Blimling, 1996, pp. 157-159).

Although Terenzini, Pascarella, and Blimling clearly offer supportive evidence for the impact of out-of-class educational experiences on student learning, the authors themselves note a glaring weakness for the meta-analysis: The majority of studies analyzed were based on research on white, full-time, residential, four-year college students. As a result, generalization to institutions with a more diverse population is suspect.

The second body of knowledge that offers student affairs scholar practitioners an applicable research base on student learning centers on theories of institutional conditions or ethos. George Kuh and associates have engaged in numerous research studies detailing institutional variables that contribute to student learning, with a special interest in what occurs outside of the classroom.

Involving Colleges: Successful Approaches to Fostering Student learning and Development Outside the Classrooms (Kuh, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates 1991) and *Student Success: Creating Conditions that Matter* ((Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates 2005) serve as prominent markers of the institutional ethos approach. The purpose for the study which *Involving Colleges* documented was to “describe the factors and conditions that characterize...colleges and universities that provide undergraduate students with unusually rich opportunities for out-of-class learning and personal development – that complement the institution’s educational goals” (Kuh, et al, 1991, p. xii). Fourteen institutions participated in the study. They were selected through a rigorous nomination and research process guided by five decisions rules established by the research team; the institutions differed in size and type.

Kuh and associates identified concrete practices that characterize colleges that try to involve their students including mission and philosophy, campus culture, campus environment, policies and practices, and institutional agents (Kuh, et al, 1991). Table 3 outlines the practices of involving colleges in each area. Based on their interviews and observations from site visits at the

participating institutions, Kuh and his associates made the following conclusions about institutional factors that encourage involvement:

1. A clear mission, kept plainly in view (p. 341).
2. Value and expect student initiative and responsibility (p. 345).
3. Recognize and respond to the total student experience (p. 347).
4. Provide small, human-scale environments and multiple subcommunities (p. 351).
5. Value students and take them and their learning seriously (p. 359).
6. Institutions that are able to generate feelings of loyalty and a sense of specialness encourage involvement (p. 363).

Table 3

Conditions of Involving Colleges

College Area	Conditions of Involving Colleges
Mission & Philosophy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members of various groups understand and can describe what the institution is trying to accomplish • Means (policies, practices, standard ops) interact with mission and are expressed consistently • Mission communicates "great expectations" for students • Programs and services serve as "levelers" and "ladders" to increase students' chances for academic success and satisfaction • Multiple sub-communities • Non-curricular programs and services complement the institution's educational purposes, suggesting that "we're all headed in the same direction." (Kuh, et al, 1991, p. 257)
Campus Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Culture and subcultures promote involvement and ownership • Ethics of memberships • Use of "terms of endearment" • Elements described create a shared understanding of how the institution works, what is valued, and how to get things done
Campus Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Properties used to educational advantage • Organizations create "small spaces and human places" <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The physical plant is well maintained and not overpowering 2. The psychological size-feel of place-is appropriate, comfortable and manageable so that small colleges seem larger and vice versa 3. Students are not anonymous 4. Indoor and outdoor nooks encourage informal, spontaneous interaction among all community members 5. Students can appropriate person space and be alone if desired 6. Opportunities for meaningful involvement are in ample supply.

Policies and Practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistent with mission and values • Newcomers feel welcome • Institutional anticipatory socialization process • Induction activities, both formal and informal, communicate appropriate behavior and standards for both social and academics
Institutional Agents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Put their money where their mind is". • Reflect characteristics of leadership of high-performing systems • Take long-term view and devote time <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Administrators communicate mission and priorities 2. CAO's acknowledge the importance of a mutually enhancing relationship between out-of-class and curricular goals 3. SA staff have broad view of higher education and understand how in class and out-of-class experiences are complementary 4. Sensitive and committed to the institutional mission • Faculty members <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Interactions related to academic activities or concerns 2. Available and involved 3. Encourage student initiative 4. Two cultures: those who are, those who are not??? • Other agents: trustees, alumni, and support staff contribute to the student learning environment • Students <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Behavior compatible with educational purposes 2. Perpetuate important campus traditions of involvement, 3. Know how institution works, 4. Perceive their in class and out-of-class lives to be seamless 5. Take expectations seriously 6. Responsible for own learning

(Kuh, et al, 1991, pp. 256-260)

Fifteen years later, Kuh and associates offered another work documented in *Student Success in College: Creating Conditions that Matter* (2005). This work is an outgrowth of the NSSE research on student engagement drawing upon interviews and conversations with various professionals in higher education through Project DEEP (Documenting Effective Educational Practice). The purpose of this qualitative case study was “to discover and document the policies, programs, and practices at these [participant] institutions as well as related factors

and conditions that were associated with student success” (Kuh, et al, 2005, p. 327). The twenty institutions that participated in this study were selected as “model” institutions who had participated in the NSSE between 2000 and 2002. From the pool of NSSE participating institutions, the ones selected represented those with both “higher-than-predicted student engagement results and higher-than-predicted six-year graduation rates” (Kuh, et al, 2005, p. 329). Data was collected over an 18 month period with two rounds of site visits to the 20 institutions that involved interviews, document reviews and observation at numerous campus events. The research team talked to over 2,700 people including 1,300 students, 750 faculty, and 650 others, including student affairs professionals.

The analysis of the massive amounts of data collected yielded what the researchers termed “guiding principles” as well as recommendations (Tables 4 and 5). Readers of these conclusions are cautioned that the researchers’ recommendations were not meant to serve as a checklist; just offering certain programs and services discussed throughout the study does not guarantee promoting student success (Kuh, et al, 2005).

Table 4

Guiding Principles for Promoting Student Success

Tried and true	Sleepers	Fresh Ideas
Student success starts with an institutional mission that espouses the importance of talent development and then enacts this vision.	Problems and challenges are converted into opportunities.	Effective educational practices are synergistic and “sticky”.
Student success is enhanced when an institution provides many complementary policies and practices to support students academically and socially.	Engaging pedagogies are mainstreamed, rather than marginalized.	Students flourish when their prior learning is valued and their preferred learning styles are recognized.
Making programs and resources available is necessary but not sufficient to promote student success. Schools must induce large numbers of students to use them.	Organizational structure doesn’t matter (much) to student success.	Students are more likely to thrive when support comes from multiple sources.
Student success is promoted by setting and holding students to standards that stretch them to perform at high levels, inside and outside the classroom.	Data were used to guide institutional reflection and action.	Curricular improvements that enhance student learning are typically grounded in a contemporary fusion of the liberal and practical arts.
Student success becomes an institutional priority when leaders make it so.	Assessment serves many important institutional purposes, only one of which is measure student performance.	
Financial and moral support for programs are both necessary and important for sustaining effective educational practice.	Widespread use of student paraprofessionals enhances the climate for learning.	
Staying the course...	Student success is enhanced when the student affairs’ operating philosophy is congruent with the institution’s academic mission.	
Ultimately, it’s about culture.	Electronic technology complements intentional face-to-face student-faculty contact. A powerful sense of place connects students to the institution and to one another.	

(Kuh, et al, 2005, pp. 265-2

Table 5

Recommendations for Increasing the Chance of Promoting Student Success

<p>Feature student success in the institution’s enacted educational mission and purposes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DEEP schools featured student success in their visions of what they aspired to accomplish with their undergraduate program. • Clarify and translate the mission in plain language to stakeholders. • Ensure that the espoused mission is enacted. • Senior leaders must publicly and repeatedly champion undergraduate education. • Strive to appropriately balance the institution’s multiple missions.
<p>Make talent development a central tenet in the institution’s operating philosophy.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish high expectations – for everyone. • Know your students. • Set performance standards for students at high but attainable levels consistent with their academic preparations. • Provide generous amounts of helpful, constructive feedback. • Balance academic challenge with adequate support. • Use pedagogical approaches that complement students’ learning styles. • Encourage the types of student-faculty interactions that pay dividends in terms of student development.
<p>Cultivate an ethic of positive restlessness</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Steer the organization toward continuous improvement. • Use data to inform decision making. • “Sunset” less effective programs and activities in order to support high-priority initiatives.
<p>Put money where it will make a difference in student engagement.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Put someone in charge. • Invest in activities that contribute to student success. • Invest in faculty members who are doing the right thing. • Invest in teaching and learning centers. • Invest in opportunities that allow students to apply what they are learning in ways that also benefit others. • Consider a budgeting model that privileges student learning processes and outcomes.
<p>Feature diversity, inside and outside the classroom.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a multifaceted, aggressive approach to diversify the student body, faculty, and staff. • Ensure that diverse perspectives are represented in the curriculum.
<p>Attract, socialize, and reward competent people.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Align the reward system with the institutions’ mission, values, and priorities. • Pick institutional leaders right for the times, campus culture, and institutional trajectory. • Recruit faculty and staff who are committed to student learning. • Emphasize student centeredness in faculty and staff orientation. • Make room for differences. • Ensure high-quality student support services.

Encourage collaboration across functional lines and between the campus and community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage and reward cross-functional activities focused on student success. • Tighten the philosophical and operational linkages between academic and student affairs. • Harness the expertise of other resources. • Make governance a shared responsibility. • Form partnerships with the local community.
Lay out the path to student success.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draw a map for student success. • Front load resources to smooth the transition. • Align the physical environment with institutional priorities and goals for student success. • Teach newcomers about the campus culture. • Create a sense of specialness about being a student here. • If an activity or experience is important to student success, consider requiring it.
Re-culture the institution for student success.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop interventions for underengaged students. • Identify cultural properties that are obstacles to student success. • Expand the number of cultural practitioners on campus.

(Kuh, et al., 2005, pp. 298-316)

Another powerhouse quantitative body of research on the student experience centers on the work of the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) currently under the direction of Sylvia Hurtado. The Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) Freshman Survey represents the oldest, most diverse and expansive capture of student educational experiences to date and includes over 15 million student responses (HERI, 2010). Other surveys in this CIRP group include *Your First College Year (YFCY)*, and *College Senior Year* surveys.

The strengths of the CIRP longitudinal study include capturing a more diverse student experience picture including single administration to both 2- and 4-year colleges, administration of the survey at the start of the student experience typically at orientation programs, a more application set of survey questions compared to NSSE including values and attitudes, and trend data dating from 1966 allowing institutions to examine change over the course of time. The

outcomes of the CIRP surveys are national norms report for each year that details aggregate data as well as highlights trends in higher education.

As mentioned above, the CIRP surveys focus on a more diverse perspective than other surveys mentioned in this study. This is also reflected in the work of the HERI director, Sylvia Hurtado. Hurtado's work has been grounded in understanding the college experience of unrepresented students including a focus on Latino and African-American students, and specifically she is identified with the Diverse Democracy Project. This research project explores how colleges and universities prepare students to live and work in an ethnically diverse world. The aims of the project include:

How colleges are creating diverse learning environments and are actively preparing students to live and work in an increasingly complex and diverse democracy;

The role of the diverse peer group in the acquisition of important cognitive, social, and democratic outcomes both inside and outside of classroom environments;

Student outcomes that can be best achieved through specific kinds of initiatives designed to increase student engagement with diverse perspectives. (The Regents of the University of Michigan, 2003).

Similar to the work of Kuh and associates, the research in the Diverse Democracy Project has yielded a typology of campuses that includes "co-

curricular initiatives” detailed in Table 6. As detailed below, the primary goal of the Co-curricular Initiatives centers on increasing self-awareness, one of the primary tasks demonstrated by students in this research study. This concept will be discussed in Chapter 6 more thoroughly.

Table 6

Typology of Campus Inventory: Co-curricular Initiatives

	Co-curricular Initiatives
Description	Educational programs and activities which occur outside of the formal classroom
Subcategories	1. Rituals & celebrations 2. Workshops & retreats 3. Student organizations 4. Intergroup dialogs
Goals	To increase awareness of self, others, and self in relationship to others
Desired Outcomes	Intercultural communication and relationship-building within the entire campus community
Administrative Level	Executive level, faculty, practitioners, students, and community members

(The Regents of the University of Michigan, 2003).

A third type of learning theory body of knowledge applicable to this study is Baxter Magolda’s Epistemology Reflection Model (1992, 1995) that describes four ways of knowing (Table 7). According to Baxter Magolda, students’ assumptions about knowing influence their meaning making of experiences both in and out of the classroom. In order for student affairs practitioners to understand student experiences, they must understand students’ epistemologies (Baxter Magolda, 1992).

Table 7

Ways of Knowing

Time of Development	Way of Knowing	Characteristics
During College	Absolute	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge is certain. • Information is acquired from a person of authority. • Peers possess information only if they have acquired it from an authority.
	Transitional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge is uncertain. • Learning transforms from acquisition to understanding. • Peers play a greater role in understanding information.
	Independent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge is uncertain. • Learning involves developing individual perspective. • Peers' views help develop individual perspectives.
Post College	Contextual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge is constructed. • Multiple viewpoints and expert advice in a specific context is used to construct knowledge. • Peer perspectives are assessed and evaluated to the knowledge construct.

(Baxter Magolda, 1992, 1995)

In a four year longitudinal study, Baxter Magolda explored how students' out-of-class experiences influenced their development. Participants were drawn from a random sample of first year students at a Midwestern, public university with an enrollment of 16,000. The group consisted of 101 students, 51 women and 50 men, with similar academic ability as determined by ACT scores. Participants were interviewed in the fall of each year of the study. Student participants defined co-curricular or out-of-class categories as peer relationships, organizational involvement, living arrangements, internship and employment experiences, international experiences, personal changes, and decision-making.

Each type of knower was reported to have differing experiences (Table 8). Baxter Magolda identified the following themes: absolute knowers - adjustment to college; transitional knowers – preparing to function effectively in the world; and independent knowers – independent thinking and functioning. Interpretations of experiences were not influenced by class rank.

Table 8

Co-curricular Themes by Category and Epistemology

Category	Absolute Knowing	Transitional Knowing	Independent Knowing
Peer relationships	Friendships <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learn from differences and build relationships (F) Support (M) 	Friendships <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Friends influence (Jr F) Support Outlets (So, Jr M) Peers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learn differences (So; Jr F) Closed attitude (Jr M; Sr F) 	Close friends (Jr, Sr F) Learn to appreciate diversity (JR M)
Organizational involvement	Responsibility (F)	Responsibility, leadership (M; Jr, Sr F) Practical (M; Jr F) Friends (Jr, Sr F) Learn about others (M)	Independent functioning (Sr M)
Living arrangements		Independence and responsibility (Jr, Sr) Learn to deal with others (Jr, Sr M)	
Internships and employment		Gain skills (Jr) Learn about self (Jr F) Outlet (Jr M) Deal with people (Sr) Help others (Sr F) Practical experience (Sr M)	Learn about people and careers (Sr M)
International experiences			Independence Think differently, different point of view (Sr F) Responsibility (Sr F) Self-examination (Sr F)

			Encounter diversity (Sr M)
Personal Changes	Independence	Independence	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-discipline, less worry about others' views (So F0) • On your own (Sr F) • Learn about self and others (So M) • Responsibility (Jr, Sr M) 	
Decision making	Rely on authority	Decide upon major	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rely on experience (So) • Stressful (So) 	
		Job search	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pressure (Sr F) • Opportunity (Sr M) 	

Note: So = Sophomore, Jr = Junior, Sr = Senior, F = Female, M = Male
(Baxter Magolda, 1992, p. 207)

In a second phase of this longitudinal study, Baxter Magolda interviewed college graduates over three years with 59 participants in the fifth year, 70 in the sixth year, to 48 in the seventh and final year. It is during this phase of the research that Baxter Magolda added contextual knowing to her theory. This phase of the study indicated that contextual knowers were more likely to assess and evaluate others views. They were also more likely to occur through relationships than in academic studies, opening the door for student affairs professionals to influence student development. Baxter Magolda notes that student affairs professionals gravitate toward the relational mode. Furthermore, she concludes, “When student affairs staff are involved in these interactions, students are more likely to construct their own belief systems rather than bow to peer pressure” (1995, p. 214).

Baxter Magolda ended this study with a discussion of several areas of co-curricular practice utilizing the challenge-support model of development derived

by developmental theorists Piaget and Rodgers. By understanding the challenges each type of knower encounters and helping each to build adequate support offers student affairs scholar practitioners an avenue for impacting student learning and development.

Summary

The traditional paradigm in higher education asserts that learning occurs in the classroom, and perhaps is reinforced by educationally purposeful activities linked to class content (Barr & Tagg, 1995; Kuh & Associates, 2005). The direct measures have been traditional course grades or standardized tests. However, the learning paradigm allows for learning to occur in multiple arenas in, around, and connected to the campus (Barr & Tagg, 1995). Planning for and providing student learning no longer belongs only to the academic house, but is a shared responsibility and an obligation for the entire institution. Student affairs professionals are just beginning to understand their functional role in shaping student learning. Many divisions and departments are engaged in a great deal of assessment of student learning. Likewise, educators and administrators have volumes of data at their disposal, such as the plethora of information generated by NSSE and the educational projects involved in discovering conditions that promote success and the relationships between faculty and peers on student learning (Kuh & Associates, 2005). However, little, if any research exists that specifically targets what students are learning in student affairs functional areas or out-of-class educational experiences and how they make meaning of their

experiences. This research project will explore this missing piece of the student learning puzzle.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Frequently there are multiple routes available to arrive at a given destination, with some paths being more preferable than others. Likewise, there are multiple methodologies possessing unique assumptions of the nature of reality for researching a problem, with strengths and weaknesses for each method applied to any given problem. This chapter outlines the methodological rationale and procedures employed to study the research question. The chapter begins with a discussion on the assumptions and rationale for an overall qualitative approach. Qualitative description is presented through a brief history and review of the processes involved in this research method. The actual research procedures are outlined in sections dealing with data collection and analysis. A short discussion of how the findings are treated is included prior to concluding with ethical issues affiliated with this student participant based project.

Assumptions and the Rationale for a Qualitative Design

In discovering how students make meaning of their out-of-class educational experiences, a qualitative approach offers the perspective required to delineate meaning among various experiences of college students. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) describe qualitative research as examining the real world rather than controlled conditions. Creswell (2003) defines qualitative research as:

...an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem (p. 15).

Several assumptions differentiate qualitative research from quantitative approaches (Creswell, 2003) (Table 9) which make this approach appropriate for

this research project which attempts to understand the in-depth nature of experience, such as capturing the individual college student experience that occurs in the extensive arena of out-of-class learning domain.

Table 9

Assumptions of Research Approaches

Assumptions Commonly Associated with Qualitative Approaches	Assumptions Commonly Associated with Quantitative Approaches
Seeks understanding	Affirms determination
Utilizes multiple participant meanings	Strives for reduction of ideas to test
Draws on social and historical construction	Draws on empirical observation and measurement
Generates theory	Verifies theory

Overview of Qualitative Description

Within the emerging field of qualitative research, researchers are presented with a plethora of traditions and designs. Although much attention has been paid to the dominate traditions of qualitative research, such as qualitative description, case study, or phenomenology, qualitative description affords researches to opportunity to accurately portray the phenomenon under study without following a cumbersome interpretive stance while using everyday language (Sandelowski, 2000). Qualitative description will augment the existing research and practice on the student learning experience which has been primarily informed by quantitative survey research. Qualitative description is a dynamic approach that emphasizes research as an on-going, constantly developing process rather than an isolated point-in-time. This is especially appropriate as this study attempts to gain further insight into the multiple year experiences of students

rather than a single “snapshot” of college experiences indicative of the predominate research based on survey designs.

Qualitative description falls along the naturalistic research, research that is situated within a field context as contrasted to carefully controlled laboratory conditions, which arguably do not exist in an applied or practitioner discipline. The complex nature of the student experience and the underexplored area of out-of-class educational experiences represent an appropriate use of qualitative description in this research project.

Qualitative Description Processes

As part of the qualitative approach, qualitative description as a method shares processes with other qualitative methods, and at times blurs the boundaries with the practices associated with other qualitative methods (Sandelowski, 2000). For example, process typically affiliated with grounded theory, such as coding and categorizing, are often used to make sense out of the data in a qualitative description design. The essential component to qualitative description lies in the accuracy of the researcher’s interpretation of the data as

researchers conducting qualitative descriptive studies stay closer to their data and to the surface of the words and events than researchers conducting grounded theory, phenomenological, ethnographic, or narrative study” (Sandelowski, 2000, p. 336).

Data Collection Procedures

In a qualitative description study, data collection involves a cyclical and iterative process. For the purposes of this study, data collection procedures and

data analysis will be presented separately. In describing common data collection activities within various qualitative traditions, Creswell (1998) identifies seven issues the research must address: the site and participants, access and rapport, sampling strategies, data forms, recording processes, data storage, and field issues (p. 113).

The Site and Participants

The research question which guided the decisions for selecting participants centered on how students make meaning of their out-of-class educational experiences. This broad topic could have involved multiple sites or campuses. However, for the purposes of this study, bounded by limited resources of time, interviewers, and finances, the selection of the site was a four-year private, independent, Catholic college in the Northeast. Accessibility to students and an institutional climate focusing on student learning are among additional factors that contributed to the decision to use this institution for this study. The institution utilized in this study will be referred to as The College.

The College is a relatively young institution located ten miles south of a metropolitan area, on the edge of the suburban area nestled between a private Catholic girl's high school and a convent of the founders of The College. Some common contextual factors that influence the experience of all students at The College in multiple levels include:

- Rapid growth and expansion in the last 15 years, moving from a 2-year, all women's college to a 4-year co-educational college with a full time enrollment of about 950.

- A new President after the previous president had served for several decades.
- The expansion of majors, buildings, staff and faculty.
- The transition from a professional to a liberal education philosophy.

The students of The College represent a diverse participant pool in terms of demographics as The College possesses a large adult learner (over 24 years of age) and commuter population. Only about 15% of the current traditional age (17-23) student population resides on campus. Likewise, several ethnic populations are represented such as African-American, Hispanic, and Native American which make up 8.3% of the total student body. The criteria for selecting student participants are presented in the *Sampling Strategies* section below.

Role of the Researcher

A unique attribute of several types of qualitative research is that the researcher becomes a data collection tool (Chambliss & Schutt, 2006), often developing a personal relationship with participants due to the naturalistic character of data collection. Consequently, qualitative researchers are encouraged to clearly identify their relationships, personal interests and biases related to their project (Creswell, 2003).

For the purposes of this study, the researcher served as the data collection tool, also referred to as the interviewer. The most central bias to this research project centers on the professional roles the researcher possessed during the data collection phase: student affairs professional, athletic coach, and adjunct

instructor. In order to minimize the potential bias, one of the criteria for selecting participants was limited pre-study interaction or relationship with the researcher.

Access and Rapport

Gaining access to participants represents one of the challenges facing all researchers of the college experience due to privacy and research abuse concerns. However, gaining access to student participants at The College was viable for several reasons. First, one of the educational outcomes of The College focused on engaging students in campus related-research. Initial dialogues with The College Administration related to this project yielded positive interest. The following actions were conducted in order to acquire approval for this research project to be conducted within The College:

1. Since The College did not possess a formal institutional review board, the research proposal was submitted to the Director of Institutional Research and Planning for initial approval.
2. The final research proposal was submitted to the Vice Presidents of Academic Affairs and Student Life for approval.
3. The Vice Presidents then submitted the proposal to the Administrative Council for final approval. This council consisted of the President and the Vice Presidents of the College.
4. Concurrently, the research proposal was submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Arizona State University for approval as a doctoral student research study.

The IRB office concluded that a consent form was not required for this research. However, the following information was included in the participant information letter, a sample of which is located in Appendix A:

- The right to voluntarily withdraw from the study at any time.
- The central purpose of the study and the procedures to be used in data collection.
- Comments about protecting the confidentiality of the respondents.
- A statement about known risks associated with participation in the study.
- The expected benefits to accrue to the participants in the study (Creswell, 1998, pp. 115-116).

Sampling Strategies

Qualitative description offers a menu of sampling strategies to researchers. The primary purpose of sampling is to select enough cases or participations to “explore the common and unique manifestations of a target phenomenon across a broad range of phenomenally and/or demographically varied cases” (Sandelowski, 1995, as cited in Sandelowski, 2000, p. 337-338). Researchers often begin with a homogeneous sample of participants. However, the sample may evolve to a new group or site to more fully saturate the topic through data analysis. Based on practical limitations, this study employed a purposeful sampling strategy resulting from a recommendation list of students demonstrating qualities that were determined to be vital in understanding how students make meaning of their out-of-class educational experiences.

Students graduating from The College in the spring 2007 semester represented the initial participant pool. Because of the size of The College community, many staff and faculty collaborate on student learning issues. As a result of this collegiality, recommendations for student participants were elicited from both faculty and staff including the Vice President for Student Life, the Director of Student Activities, the Director of Multicultural Affairs, the Chairperson of the Human Services Department, and the Director of the Academic Services Center. After an initial consultation with the Vice President for Student Life, it was decided the pool would be narrowed to students inducted into The College's Honor Society. The Honor Society requirements included not only outstanding academic achievement, but campus and community leadership as well. Ten students are chosen annually for the Honor Society by The College from a pool of students selected as *Who's Who Among College Students* by submitting an essay evaluated by a selection committee of staff and faculty. Additional criteria were suggested to help identify four to five participants who would be able to effectively contribute to this research study. The basic criteria included:

- Adequate verbal communication skills,
- The ability to express personal beliefs and accurately describe events in his or her life, and
- An effective leader on campus.

Students recommended by campus experts were initially contacted by phone to gauge their interest level. Those indicating an interest were mailed an

invitation letter including a project overview and timeline. Tentative interview times and locations were determined as well.

Additional Data Collection

As with several qualitative approaches, qualitative description employs simultaneous data collection and analysis. Analysis started with basic coding, a process of relating categories and concepts which allows the researcher to explore significant variations and relationships within the identified. Following the initial coding of the data from the interviews (Round One data collection), the researcher determined a second round of data was necessary from the same participants (Round Two).

Type of Data Collection

Much of qualitative research relies upon observation for data collection. Qualitative description allows for various methods of data collection such as observations, interviews, documents, and audiovisuals. Interviews served as the predominant method for this project, offering a strategic opportunity to gain the necessary data with available resources.

Steiner Kvale (1996) describes qualitative interviews as “a construction site for knowledge” (p. 14). This method yields substantial narrative data for analysis to reveal concepts to build a theory relating to how students make meaning of their out-of-class educational experiences. As with any method, interviews offer both advantages and disadvantages such as those identified by Creswell (2003) depicted in Table 10.

Table 10

Advantages and Limitations of Interviews

Advantages	Limitations
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Useful when participants cannot be observed directly• Participants can provide historical information• Allows researcher “control” over the line of questioning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provides “indirect” information filtered through the views of the interviewees• Provides information in a designated “place” rather than the natural field setting• Researcher’s presence may bias response• People are not equally articulate and perceptive

This research project utilized structured interviews with four participants. The researcher served as the interviewer. Both rounds of interviews were guided by protocols available in Appendix B: Interview Protocols. The first interview protocol was pilot tested with two participants not included in the study. The pilot sample participants were able to ask questions and receive explanations so they could understand the questions in the protocol; they were also asked to provide feedback on the interview process. The feedback was used to refine the protocol and improve participant rapport.

As mentioned previously, the data collection timeline unfolded into two separate interview rounds as well as one reflective narrative and lasted from the late fall of 2007 through the spring of 2009. This timeline includes interview verbatim transcription and concurrent analysis as is common in qualitative research.

Recording Procedures

Since the interviews for this research project was conducted in-person, two simultaneous recording procedures were utilized: digital audio recording and

field notes. Digital audio recordings permit logging and cross-sectioning various sections of multiple data groups to aid in analysis. Interviews were digitally recorded using a microphone and laptop computer. A handheld micro digital recorder was used as back up. Field notes were taken using the laptop computer and involved documenting probing questions and comments along with the standard interview protocol.

Data Storage

The interviews were recorded digitally into files stored on a laptop computer initially. After each individual interview was conducted, digital files were copied to a flash drive and a desk top computer along with typed field note and transcriptions of the audio recordings.

Field Issues

All types of field research possess inherent problems that must be addressed by the researcher. Faulty equipment was an issue that plagued the researcher. During the first round of interviews, at the third interview, the digital recording program on the laptop failed to record beyond 30 seconds of the interview, and the backup recorder also failed for unknown reasons. These failures were not known until the interview was complete although an equipment check was done at the start of the interview. To compensate for the equipment failure, the field notes were expanded and then checked by the participant for accuracy. To avoid future malfunctions of recording equipment, periodic equipment checks throughout interviews were incorporated in the remaining sessions.

Data Analysis Procedures

Qualitative designs strive to make "sense out of text and data image" by employing an array of procedures ranging from generic qualitative analysis to more systematic processes such as grounded theory (Creswell, 2003, p.190).

Qualitative description seeks to be the least interpretive of the qualitative approaches, in that data is represented or described primarily using the language of the participants without the structure of pre-determined codes. Interpretation from analysis is derived directly from the data (Sandelowski, 2000).

As previously mentioned, qualitative description employs a simultaneous data collection and analysis process, and may utilize processes from other types of qualitative research. As soon as the interview data was collected and transcribed in this study, the coding analysis process began. In this research study, basic coding was employed to organize the data.

Data Coding

Nvivo 7 was utilized to help organize the coding processes. During the initial coding process, the data was examined to "uncover, name and develop concepts" by "breaking down data into discrete parts" comparing for similarities and differences (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 102). Round One data was broken into about 100 initial categories. During this process, memos within Nvivo (essentially notes for the researcher) were constructed to document the analysis process including recording "thoughts, interpretations, questions, and directions for further data collection" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 110). After several

analytical reviews of the data, patterns emerged and data was parsed into main categories or parent nodes, and subcategories or child nodes.

During coding abstracted descriptions were established through memos. This process also helped to identify gaps in the data needed to answer the proposed research questions. As a result, a second round of interview questions were constructed, approved, and employed (Round Two) with data collection and analysis procedures similar to those in Round One.

Data Re-Presentation

The product of qualitative description is a “descriptive summary of the informational contents of data organized in a way that best fits the data” (Sandelowski, 2000, p. 338-339). Researchers have several options for organizing the presentation of the data. The summaries of this research study are organized by participant, as outline in Chapter 4.

Strategies for Validating Findings

Because of the nature of qualitative projects, researchers strive to design studies that are believable, accurate and correct (Creswell, 1998), or as Stake (1995) explains, “Did we get it right?” In qualitative research, it is paramount that the findings make sense to other stakeholders such as the participants, readers or peers. Practitioners in each qualitative approach have identified rigorous standards to ensure quality research.

Qualitative description strongly emphasizes the notion of getting it right with the concept of the theory fitting the phenomena. In this study, member checks were utilized to ensure the fit of a theory to the phenomena. Verification

is a constant activity in the analysis of data in qualitative description. Once the descriptions were generated, the literature surrounding the phenomenon was used for supplemental validation by comparing accuracy and accounting for divergent conclusions from the published material (Creswell, 1998). This information is detailed in Chapter 6.

Reporting the Findings

The final research report includes the presentation of data in Chapter 4 and a descriptive narrative found in Chapter 5. The focus of the report is to capture a holistic picture of the voices of students to describe an emerging theoretical model. Upon completion, a copy of the study will be submitted to The College's Vice Provost (former Vice President of Student Life).

Ethical Issues

Perhaps the most significant set of methodological issues centers on ethical considerations. First, the anonymity of the participants is an issue. Participants were assigned a pseudonym to protect their identity, especially crucial for such a small college community. A related issue centers on the disclosures about others by participants during their interviews. Again, this is especially difficult because of the size of the college community, but extremely important because of potential impact on the professional careers of individual staff and faculty. As a result, participants were directed to avoid identifying other people, including students, staff, and faculty, by name. If a staff member was identified by a participant, a pseudonym was assigned to protect their identity.

Summary

This chapter served to detail how the research project unfolded through qualitative description. The following chapters depict the experiences of the student participants (Chapter 4), the researcher (Chapter 5), and put the findings regarding the students' experience in the context of the current literature on student learning (Chapter 6).

TURNING POINTS

This chapter presents the results of data gleaned from interviews with the four participants relating to their individual making meaning of out-of-class educational experiences. The participants described how they became involved in out-of-class experiences and the skills they used to manage their roles, but it was the turning points of their experience that highlight how they started to make meaning of their out-of-classroom experiences by gaining internal and external understandings of the world around them. Turning points represent moments or experiences that have saliency for the participants, where concepts and ideas meet personal application, where the participants gain understanding of the world in which they live, work and interact with others.

Two dimensions of these turning points are delineated from the participants' experiences: external and internal awareness. The external awareness of the participants will be presented first. This set of data relates how each participant described how their understanding of others' experiences changed resulting in a shifting of their worldview. Second, the data relating to internal awareness will be presented. This set of data describes how the participants began to understand themselves as a result of their out-of-class turning points.

External Awareness's Gleaned from Turning Points

Mario's External Awareness

The bulk of Mario's out-of-class activity centered on a sports club team he helped to establish and lead from his freshmen year as a captain. Being thrust into a leadership position was quite a contrast from Mario's high school experience:

In high school I kinda took a back seat. I kinda rode it out because I wasn't ...I played a lot of sports in high school but I wasn't always in charge all the time so I kinda took the back seat and went along with whoever else was in charge [M-1].²

However, upon entering The College, Mario connected with a fledgling sports club. This sports club became the center of his out-of-class experience and the backdrop for his understanding of the world around him and especially his role in being an agent of change.

From its inception, the sports club served as a catalyst for players to engage in community relationships because the club team lacked the formal support system that exists for NCAA athletics. Mario grew up in the local community thus possessing strategic social connections. For instance, Mario had worked in one of the facilities that the sports club needed to rent. In addition to local community connections, the members of the sports club also made connections with staff and faculty on campus. For instance, two staff members became club advisors who helped the players identify the community service initiatives which give the club much of its identity.

² The notations on the quotations are: M for Mario along with the number which corresponds to Mario's numbered comments in the dataset. Notations take on the same format as the speaker changes (e.g., J(Jack)-1).

Mario's primary external understanding began with the awareness that others are in need:

You know just by hearing stories, you see your community, local businesses have fliers up and that we happened to umm through friends of friends knowing people that had this situation. Then we found out through branches that more people had it with in the local community like Rob and that our coach works with a Hamburg detective and it was his daughter that we raised all that money for. So it was kinda good because we're helping our coach out in his community. [M-11]

Members of the sports club became involved in fundraising for a girl in the community who had cancer. What appears powerful to the participant is twofold. First, the sports club team members were able to raise a significant amount of money:

We raised like \$4000 just the hockey team, and that is like double the money we get from the school. And all the money went right to her and she was able to have successful surgeries. And the team really felt they were a part of that and the community. [M-2].

Second, and perhaps more empowering, was that the participants felt that because of their large contribution, they were personally involved in this girl's recovery: "and also help the community by a using the hockey team as the main source, you know, to help with cancer...we helped a young girl recover from cancer because of all the money we raised for her. "[M-3].

The success from this effort spurred the team to continue making a difference in other peoples' lives through their fundraising efforts. As Mario described their current endeavors,

And same right now we are helping Rob out you know...in memory of his daughter we're giving it up to Alex's lemonade stand we started a fund for him and his family...and we continue to grow. We just started Haven House. We had a Christmas hockey net. And everyone put all their stuff in the net and the tree. Everyone was very thankful for that and it was just a wonderful time." [M-4]

Later on, Mario enthusiastically described the feelings associated with making a difference in the life of someone else as he describes his best out-of-class experience:

Like I said all the community service work how everybody's sending you all these 'wow this is awesome I can't believe you guys are doing this umm this is really great.' Like Alex's lemonade stand the founders of that were really shocked that a college level team wanted to help out, like an organization like that. So just, you know we had something here we were thankful to have a program here at school and now we're sending our thanks to everybody in the community and everybody else who we can help. [M-5]

Because of Mario's out-of-class experiences with the sports club, he gained a compassionate view of the needs of his community, and the power that even a small group can have on very serious problems.

Jack's External Awareness

Much of Jack's reflections on his college experience center on the person he was becoming. However, Jack did describe one incident of an external turning point. Like Mario, Jack too was an athlete at The College. Jacked played three varsity NCAA-governed sports and those experiences clearly had an impact on him and his social role on campus:

I was involved in three sports: baseball, basketball and golf. So the people I met through that and the people, I mean you met so many people just through sports. A lot of people know you because you play sports here just because it's such a small campus. So the friends that I met just through sports alone was a pretty good out-of-classroom experience. [J-8]

However, in contrast to Mario, Jack's discussion of his turning points centered more on his major and career choices, as well as embedded experiences as a leader. Perhaps this is because Jack participated for four years in the Leadership Scholars program at The College, a program of leadership education and hands-on experiences including community service and multiple public presentations on these experiences. The Leadership Scholars program required student participation in out-of-class activities that resulted in broadening the students' experiences. Jack describes the program as follows:

Well, I was involved in the leadership scholarship program ...I mean the leadership made me involved in a lot of the other activities like all the programs that went on here at The College. I mean the things that Mr. S made you do were mandatory for you to do, was be involved on campus.

So I got to meet a lot of different people through that that came from different cultures that came, that are just different than me in general. Just through the leadership program because he made it mandatory for us to do it. Which was, which at the time I didn't think was a really great idea because I didn't want to do it, but now that I'm done I'm kinda glad that I did do it because I met a lot of people that I probably wouldn't have met unless I did stuff like that... [J-1]

“Stuff like that” afforded Jack the opportunity to interact with people who were different from him which led Jack to relate a very poignant interaction with another person that challenged his understanding of others' religious experiences:

I mean, I've been around people that were different race, different color my whole life. I lived in the city in [Metro] so it's not like I lived in the country. I mean like a small, just small country. I mean I've been in the city so I've been seen every different race you can imagine. Just, I was in a Catholic school. I've been in a Catholic school my, basically my whole life. I was in a public school until 5th grade but then I went on to a Catholic and then I went to a Catholic high school and now a Catholic college. So it was different to um see some of the religious backgrounds of some of the people and how religious they were. Cuz, I mean I'm not a religious guy. I'm Catholic but I'm just not really into it. I mean some people really believe in what they believe in, which is respectful. I mean that they believe in certain things like I wouldn't get it... like Sunday like they're like 'I gotta go to church.' And it's like, 'oh, I mean why do you

really have to go to church?’ And they’re like just ‘because I want to. I want to go to church.’ So I mean I think the religious beliefs of people really was an eye opener because I really didn’t think people were, I mean, you hear about it but I never really thought people were that involved into it. And it was pretty cool to see the different beliefs in some, that some people have. [J-2]

While Jack’s view of his own religious experience may not have been altered by this encounter, his ability to understand that others view and practice the same religion differently certainly was an outcome of this discussion.

Molly’s External Awareness

Molly is perhaps the most introverted, introspective participant of the group. Although most of her out-of-class involvement revolved around an academic club, she describes her plunge into this involvement through social avenues, ‘I was a commuter and I wanted to meet new people. I went with a friend. I found the people were super nice, welcoming. I fell right into the club.’ [Mo-8] Involvement in this club created opportunities for Molly to learn skills in running organizations and gaining leadership experience by becoming the club president. However, club activities also helped open up Molly’s understanding of the world in which she hoped to work.

One of Molly’s most influential external experiences was participating on a cruise to the Cayman Islands, a trip that was sponsored by an academic club affiliated with Molly’s major. While seemingly a pleasure cruise to an exotic location, Molly was quick to point out that this was an educationally purposeful

event and that they didn't "really get time to enjoy it" [Mo-2]. Club members were whisked off immediately upon making port to talk to a law professor about the rampant and devastating practice of money laundering that exists in the Cayman Islands.

What we learned in the classroom, like the money laundry and the fraud and everything, and outside of the classroom we would see that put into real life experience, put into jobs. So when we went to the Cayman Islands, that's the biggest money laundering area, so we were taught about that. And then going to the IRS and seeing the fraud and how they found it, the fraud, just like checks. They do the handwriting signature analysis and ink analysis and everything and I guess putting together what you learned in the textbook to actual real life. [Mo-4]

For Molly, this experience took a text book experience and placed it in reality as she saw firsthand the impact of the type of crime she was learning how to detect and prevent in the classroom. Rather than interpreting figures in a spreadsheet, these practices changed the lives of real people.

Molly also described a second external experience that helped her to better understand the individuals she encounters. Molly grew up in a small community with a homogeneous school system. The community was not physically isolating, but definitely socially confined. While The College is not the most diverse college in the area, it was diverse enough to provide Molly with a glimpse into other's realities. For Molly, this includes family structures that were different from her own:

Divorced parents, one friend was adopted...just seeing how they are different from those who are, those [students] that live on their own, versus living with parents. I live at home still. But working and juggling... seeing what is different from what you have. [Mo-4]

This experience allowed her to learn “how to work with other people, with different backgrounds, different cultures” [Mo-3]. As Molly moves on to graduate school in a new region of the country, this small awakening will help her to accommodate the bigger new experiences that lie ahead of her, so that she won’t “take people for face value. Some of what you see is what you get – but some are not.” [Mo-8]

Rachel’s External Awareness

Whereas Molly was the most introverted of the participants, Rachel represents the most involved of the group in terms of range of out-of-class activities. Unlike Mario and Jack, who began their activities immediately upon entering school, Rachel’s involvement did not occur until after her sophomore year when everything changed:

My freshman year I wasn’t involved in any clubs. I wanted to focus just on school, um, because it was my first year and I didn’t know what to expect. I basically just stayed um with the 4-5 friends that I met going into my first year and I knew some people from high school going into The College so I basically just stayed with them. I went to class. I went to work and that was it. I didn’t know anybody. I didn’t know any of the teachers, just the ones that I had for my classes. But once I finally joined I

got a lot more involved and more people started knowing me. I didn't even go to the events at school either, so meeting people in the clubs...we would go to school events and I started to get to know my professors. And it was just...I actually was a part of the school more I would say. [R-7]

Once Rachel felt comfortable in her out-of-class environment, she began to appreciate the experiences available to her outside the classroom. For Rachel, seeing the situations of others "first hand" seemed to have a huge impact on her understanding of others:

I mean, when you're inside the classroom you learn straight from the book. They give you examples and you take a test and you answer as best as you can. But I think each example is going to be different once you're in a real experience. You're not going to have the same exact answer that the book might give you or the exact same experience. So they're differences like that, but you can work around them. To use an example from a book and then kinda work from that, but when you had that real experience it's never going to be exactly the same. But it helps you out so you don't panic as much as you might if there was a problem going on um...in one of our situations. [R-1]

Rachel was involved in multiple clubs, serving as leader in some, as well as The College's honors programs. Of all the out-of-class experiences Rachel had, she pointed to two specific club activities as the most impactful:

But I would say the most experience that I gained out of the classrooms was being in SIFE [Students in Free Enterprise] and then after that campus

ministry just because, instead of just doing classroom material, we went to other schools to work, um. We even went to, um, the Bahamas, to South Carolina and Mississippi to do extra work so that was, it took more than just, you know, taking a test or doing homework or that type of learning.

We actually saw experiences; we were there first hand. [R-6]

With a sense of awe, Rachel describes the impact of these hands-on trips in understanding how the student group could positively impact the lives of those who had been severely traumatized:

...going to Mississippi to do the hurricane relief, too. Um, there we worked with specific families and worked with the church so we got to know people, um closer. We went to a different house. I only went to two different houses to work. so between a weeks, I only met two families. And they were really special to me. I mean the woman sent us a Christmas card later as a thank-you. Um, but I mean it was just, you seen in the news what happened but going there and then listening to their stories about what happened. I mean, the family we worked with, um, the older man was dying and his son and the son's brother in law were there helping, fixing up the house but they had lost everything and we went to where their old house was and they were right by the water. And like just being there and just seeing those little parts like you could see the kitchen floor but there were no walls and it was just really touching and like everybody was just crying. And like you got to see everything first hand and it just

made you really realize what we have here and how special it is. Because they lost everything. [R-8]

These experience-laden trips impacted Rachel's understanding of others who are different from her. Rachel described associating the relevance of this cross-cultural understanding to her chosen discipline: "being a psychology major I have to think about working with the different groups of people and you can learn that in a classroom that you're going to have different cultures with other people that I may be working with differences. But going to the Bahamas was probably the biggest experience because I actually had to get involved with a different culture. Um, a lot, we didn't share the same beliefs sometimes, like even going to their mass is completely different, but we were able to adjust. Everybody working there and, um, you got to meet so many different people and they really appreciated that we were there to help them."

[R-2].

Internal Awareness's Gleaned from Turning Points

In addition to external awareness gained from turning points, each participant experienced internal awareness, or moments of self understanding.

Mario's Internal Awareness

As previously mentioned, Mario's primary out-of-class educational experiences centered on a sports club. Mario played a key role in establishing the club and moving it forward since he was a captain starting his freshmen year. Because of his initial role with the team and their competitive success, Mario became aware of the "price of fame" even in a small community such as at The

College. Mario recognized that he represented not just himself, but the whole team as well as The College in his role as team captain. As a result, his personal behavior was under constant scrutiny:

...here I was in charge, so I had to put the extra effort in, I had to stay the extra hours, I had to come in after hours and do work, I'd have to you know be up all night worried about people and then I couldn't be the kid. You know, college kids they go out and party and stuff like that. I can't be the one who goes out and, you know, drinks all the time, I have to be the example setter. And I can't be a mess so to speak because I am pretty much the face of the hockey team around the school and the team, so I have to portray it the way I feel the team should be portrayed. And the team, you know, the team is pretty really important to the team and the school." [M-8].

As Mario's role as a captain developed over the years, he began to understand and utilize the powerful idea that leaders influence change, in this case, a change in his peers. His role as a leader began to demonstrate an expressed responsibility toward the players in their personal conduct:

So in turn, I'm really hoping these guys use, I've given them something to put on their resumes type of thing. Because everybody was a part of it. And I'm really keeping these kids, I think honestly, I'm not saying they're bad kids, but you give them something to do so they're not causing trouble. They're not doing other things; they're not out partying all weekend. They're focused on hockey and they're not going to go out and

do this during the week. They're going to wake up and go to practice. They're going to be focused on their school work and hockey because if they don't keep their school up they can't play hockey. [M-9]

Mario could see the connection between the desire to play on the club team as a motivation for success in the players' personal lives and classroom success as he described his role:

You're almost like a babysitter so to speak. But you have to be somebody in their life so that you can change them. You know, break their bad habits of school work and being lazy because now they're suffering the consequences of not playing in the league because of their averages. [M-10]

Jack's Internal Awareness

Paramount to Jack's self understanding was his growing ability to "be the man." When asked how he had changed or grown over the years at The College, Jack replied:

I definitely became more responsible. I definitely learned. I've definitely learned how hard it is to live in the real world. To live by yourself to pay your own bills to have no one else to blame but yourself on certain aspects and certain situations you're in. I've definitely learned how to be a man through this experience and I've definitely had a lot of help through the people that I've met here on what kind of man I wanted to be. [J-3].

Jack went on to explain how he saw himself as a person he would respect:

I think I did, I think I became the person I wanted to be. Well, I think I became the person I wanted to be I didn't think that, I mean you always have doubts on how you're gonna develop as a man but I think I became, I think I became a pretty responsible adult. Which is all I mean I didn't have much high expectations for myself I just wanted to become someone that people liked and that people respected. And I think I did that pretty good.

[J-4]

Tied to this concept of being a respected person and "being a man," Jack's internal knowledge acquisition was exhibited in awareness of personal decision making in times of conflict with peers. On several occasions, Jack talked about developing a clear sense of what is right and wrong in his view of the world. In one discussion, Jack relates the internal dialogue he heard in his head:

I think I learned how to dictate right from wrong in certain situations.

Certain situations, that, I mean, some of my friends put themselves in that in the back of my head was like, 'it's not the right thing to do, not the right thing to do,' and I was responsible enough to say, 'I don't want to do that.'

So I kinda feel like that that was like when I learned the most on what's right and what's wrong and what I feel is right and wrong.[J-5]

Jack described learning how to make decisions in spite of peer-pressure,

In certain situations where a certain somebody was downtown drinking and they were going to drive home, um...or we were about to go out downtown drinking and they wanted me to drive but I was drinking so I was, 'but I'd rather take a taxi down.' I mean they were pressuring me to

go downtown to drive them and then drive back and I was like, ‘no, we’ll just take a taxi.’ (Pause.) Just pressure situations that every person has been in. [J-6]

Having an internal framework with which to evaluate situations, to make decisions about life seemed to be the culminating point of college development for Jack. When asked to describe his best out-of-class learning experience, he discussed challenging oneself to make good decisions:

Putting yourself in a situation you don’t want to be in and see how you react. Like not doing it purposefully obviously, but just going into a situation that I mean that you’ve never been in before, and kinda making your own decision on what you learned here on the situation. And after it’s all said and done if you can go back and see if you made the right decision. I mean that’s what I would say because I mean because everybody is going to be put into a situation they don’t want to be in and everybody is going to be in a situation that they do really want to be in. It’s just how you react to it. So you can’t really describe the best experience because it’s all just how you react to it. [J-7]

Molly’s Internal Awareness

As mentioned previously, Molly represents the most introverted of the participants, and the one with whom in and out-of-class experiences are most closely tied because most of Molly’s out-of-class involvement centered on clubs related to her major or academic-related interests. Because of this, it stands to reason that in Molly’s expression of her turning points leading to self-awareness it

was more difficult to distinguish classroom from out-of-class experiences. For Molly, the amalgamation of experiences helped her to gain knowledge about her own capabilities. For example, in terms of understanding her academic abilities, she I learned things such as:

I'm better in small groups. If I've ever had a big class, I would say over 50 people, I would probably just clam up and never learn anything because I would be too afraid to ask a question. But with small class sizes and groups it's easier to just ask a question and even to answer I mean. I guess in the classroom I've learned basically my studying style. The notes I take, what I highlight in the book, what I think is important that I need to know for the future and other things that, oh, I can probably let slide. I guess it would just be back to the obvious one. I mean trying to learn what it is that you're there to learn for that course. [Mo-5]

Once involved academically as well as out-of-class, Molly says she became more comfortable speaking in groups and in public, "Hey, I am doing this – that a big sign I came out of my shell." [Mo-1]. Realizing that she was gaining confidence in her abilities, Molly's vision of her future began to expand. When asked, "Did you become the person you thought you would become when you started college?" Molly replied:

Yes: Because I thought I would graduate, and be able to get a good job.

No: Because I didn't think I would go as far as that, getting a second degree and even going to graduate school. I didn't realize how much I

could do, how far I could go. I thought about the minimum I could do and didn't realize I could go even higher. [Mo-6].

In fact, Molly experiences were so tied to her joy in discovering her own abilities, that Molly's suggestion for a billboard advertisement for The College was, "All you want and even more!" I came in expecting the minimum; I got out doing so much more by being a president of club, getting a second degree, internships offered by teachers, more than I ever thought that would happen in college." [Mo-7]

Rachel's Internal Awareness

Rachel was the most highly involved of the participants. In addition to being an Honors Scholar, Rachel participated in multiple clubs, most gravitating towards community service:

But I would say the most experience that I gained out of the classrooms was being in SIFE and then after that campus ministry just because instead of just doing classroom material we went to other schools to work. Um, we even went to, um, the Bahamas to South Carolina, Mississippi to do extra work so that was, it took more than just, you know, taking a test or doing homework or that type of learning. We actually saw experiences we were there first hand. [R-3]

This community service had a huge impact on how Rachel came to be aware of her own privileges:

My best experience outside of the classroom was when I went and traveled to the Bahamas' or Mississippi or doing the hurricane relief work. It was

not any of the SIFE projects that we were doing, but it was just working with the people and helping them rebuild the homes that they needed to get fixed up and having them so thankful for even just like sweeping the garbage out of the house. I mean they were just completely thankful for that and those were the best experiences because it's not something you could've learned, it was just something youyou removed yourself from the classroom and learn who you are as a person and those were the best experiences because it showed that I could do that, I could leave home where I have good plumbing and the food that I want and where I have clean clothes, and then you go to a situation like that and you see people so thankful for the smallest things. You learn a lot from that. [R-4]

Summary

Through the interviews, each participant began to gain awareness that their out-of-class experiences have not only had value in terms of acquiring skills, but for understanding the world in which they live, work and interact with others. Hopefully, as the years go by, they will continue to reflect on their experiences to see how the extraordinary opportunities they had impacted them as much as or more than their traditional academic learning.

A SCHOLAR PRACTITIONER'S REFLECTION

One of the unique attributes of qualitative research centers on the researcher entering the field or environment being studied. This chapter traces my role as a participant in this research project as the instrument of data collection and analysis through personal reflections on my process of framing the study, collecting data through one-on-one interviews, professional practice, data analysis, and personally making meaning of the participants' experiences.

Reflections on Framing the Study

I started this journey of inquiry by wondering why more attention had not been paid to out-of-class learning in the involvement or engagement arena. The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) had recently been introduced, and engagement was the center of discussion in graduate classrooms, on campuses and in the higher education literature. Kuh and associates (1991, 1995) had written about out-of-class activities as well as what institutions could do to foster effective student development, but Kuh's ideas primarily focused on activities that support academic topics. The lack of research and discussion on the intrinsic educational value of out-of-class experiences represented a huge gap in the literature, a gap that left out the largest portion of time invested in college — what happens outside of the classroom.

Based on my experiences as a college student and student affairs professional, out-of-class time serves as the backdrop for some of the most significant learning, such as how to get along with other people. In fact, many of the qualities that employers are looking for can be achieved out of the classroom.

For instance, Bresciani, Zelna and Anderson (2004) list the following characteristics or qualities desired by employers:

“Twenty-first century realities in which curricular and co-curricular programs can contribute skills and competencies and that are mentioned by higher education experts, prospective employers, and career and vocational counselors are:

- Global literacy;
- Accelerated technology;
- Social ethics and social responsibility;
- Organizational networking;
- Expanding diverse consumer markets;
- Empowerment-orientated training and policy;
- Analysis of process barriers to goal attainment;
- Multicultural communities and organizations;
- Understanding of teamwork in organizations;
- A fundamental understanding of the operations and assessment associated with quality and effectiveness;
- Use of problem-solving in different settings and contexts; and
- Development of general, specific, and contextual communication skills.

For many years cocurricular professionals have encouraged the development of student leadership that incorporated many of the

aforementioned skills and competencies. Now is the time to document their presence through assessment” (p. 7).

I was thinking along the lines of assessing these competencies, but I also felt that research was needed to explore and document how these qualities can be taught in residence halls, clubs, athletic teams, and student government organizations in addition to academic venues.

Initially, I was interested in developing a companion measure to the NSSE. My argument was that the NSSE really focused on educationally purposeful activities academic in nature, such as time spent on academic contact outside of class, or how much contact students had with faculty outside of class. What happens beyond the classroom was virtually absent from the NSSE, including how student affairs professionals influence the student learning experience. As I began to explore the potential for creating a new measure, two problems quickly emerged. First, my resources were limited in terms of time and money. To develop such a tool would require a big investment, more than I was capable of making at that time. Second, there are so many variables involved in out-of-class engagement it was hard to determine where to start, especially since there is not a broad foundation of literature on the topic. Most of the research that was guiding student affairs practice at this time was transposed from the research on academic engagement. For example, practitioners assumed that time spent with students on intentionally educational activities equated with faculty spending time with students out of the classroom.

As I started my own research by framing my questions, Astin's (1993) involvement principles became the foundation of my thinking. However, Astin's research was primarily tied to classroom and course content as well but had been transposed to broader educational contexts. I began to consider whether I wanted to pursue a confirmatory research project focusing on out-of-class time as compared to academically-related activities. At this time I was also pondering Astin's self criticisms of his theory, such as whether the college experience uniquely changes young adults or whether development would occur no matter the context at this stage of people's lives. My inclination was to believe there was something unique about the college experience not found in other arenas common to 18-23 year olds. For example, by taking an entry level position right out of college, young adults would not be exposed to the same experiences afforded to college students such as in residence life, study abroad or community service.

Concurrently, I was thinking about how rarely research is applied to practical contexts. Some of the student development theories are not very "user friendly." Through my educational experiences, I was striving to truly be a scholar-practitioner; I wanted my research to result in practical applications. In my thinking, Astin's (1993) theory of involvement is one of the simplest theories to apply and measure in a real context, one with a history of successful outcomes.

As all these thoughts were ruminating in my head, I started to outline my research proposal. Originally I planned to focus my research on other scholar-practitioners based on the ease of access to professionals compared to students. However, after several dialogs with faculty, I determined that my real interest lay

with the student experience. My questions changed to a focus on how college students make meaning of their intentional out-of-class experiences. I wanted to capture what the students were learning, not just in terms of skills, but deep learning. For instance, I was not interested in how student government could teach students skills of budgeting and meeting procedures as much as how it could teach them respect and understanding for multiple points of view surrounding a complex issue.

Reflections on Data Collection

I framed my first round of interview questions and began to collect data on the student experience from participants who were highly engaged students at The College. As expected, the responses from the first round of questions yielded positive association with the college. When asked to describe their general college experiences, participants used phrases such as, “I think it was amazing” (Mario), and “I think it was a great college experience” (Jack). In describing what should be put on a new billboard, Molly’s response was:

‘All you want and even more’ – I came in expecting the minimum, I got out doing so much more by being a president of club, getting a second degree, internships offered by teachers, more than I ever thought that would happen in college.

Rachel described her experience at The College as “There’s nothing that can take the place of it at all, um, this was unique.” These results were not surprising considering the participants were selected because of their affiliation with a campus honor society as mentioned in Chapter 3.

Reflections from Concurrent Analysis

In reviewing the participants' responses, I realized two things. First, the students had difficulty separating learning that occurred in the classroom from learning outside of the classroom. For example, Rachel was involved in multiple clubs such as campus ministry, SIFE, honors. Both clubs offered service opportunities. There was not a lot of integrated learning in both arenas. Participants did not seem to distinguish the roles of staff and faculty. When asked to identify people who were significant to their, both staff and faculty were mentioned, as teachers, advisors, and mentors. The individual's role did not matter; what mattered was that he or she took the time to interact and care about them. Staff members were discussed in the same sentence as faculty, such as when Jack identified the Vice President for Student Affairs and a faculty member who taught language classes; he labeled both as "teachers."

Being part of this campus community, I was not sure how much of this blurring of silos was due to the students' lens or whether it could be attributed to the size and atmosphere of The College. The intimacy of The College seemed important for the participants. As a small college of fewer than 1000 students, The College staff and faculty knew students very well, as indicated by Rachel:

Um, overall I thought, like I loved being at The College. I actually was going to graduate early and then after getting convinced by a few teachers I decided to stay but it's just because I loved what I was doing here. Um it's small enough where you get to know everybody pretty close and get to

know your teachers, mentors and they become more like friends than just teachers.

While all small colleges claim to be very student orientated, The College had evidence others perceived this to be true. In [date] The College employed a third party to conduct a marketing study of its position in the community. The findings of this study indicated that not only did students who chose to attend The College perceive it as caring and friendly place, but those who chose to go elsewhere also held this same perception. The other condition that might attribute to this blurring of the silos is that at the time The College environment was very informal in terms of relationships. The President herself was not very formal and intentionally spent time with students outside of The Presidential Suite, such as by having lunch with students in the dining hall and attending many student functions. Additionally, staff and faculty were not seen as existing on a dais on a daily basis. Instead, they were “in the trenches” with the students. Staff tutored students when needed, and faculty helped new students move into the resident hall. All staff and faculty marched at graduation with no particular order. Given this informal atmosphere, it makes sense for student participants to view staff and faculty similarly. The students talking about staff and faculty in the same sentence, as well as associating out-of-class and in-class learning mirrored the findings of Keeling (2006) in his introduction to *Learning Reconsidered 2*: “In our need to put things in categories, we have classified some parts of higher education as curricular, and other parts as co-curricular, but students just call it college” (p. vii).

The second issue I discovered was that part of the participants' problem in discussing their out-of-class activities was that their "learning language" was explicitly tied to structured academic contexts. Education in the United States is very structured and narrowly defined. Learning takes place in the classroom and is defined by grades assessed through papers and exams. Little discussion of learning out of the classroom is mentioned in the K-12 system, and there is virtually no opportunity for students to formally reflect on out-of-class experiences. Students come to college with narrow preconceptions of learning, but are inundated with many new out-of-class opportunities. Yet on most campuses, students continue to have little or no opportunity to reflect on their out-of-class educational experiences.

A second round of questions was constructed and interviews were conducted. This set attempted to draw upon in- and out-of-class experiences, and the people central to growth during college. All of the participants were asked to define or describe learning outside of the classroom. Their responses indicated that they thought out-of-class learning was important. As Rachel said simply, "It is just something you really should have." But they had not intentionally discussed it, as indicated by Molly:

I've never thought about that. For me personally I would define it maybe as something not in the area that I'm doing? So not dealing with the accounting stuff or what I know but to me it would be new stuff. Like something I've never known before. So it'd almost be like everything else I guess.

Rachel echoed Molly's response:

Oh geez. To me it was just...I don't think I could give it one word. It's kinda like a must have. School is important and going to classes are important but I think if you're not taking what you learned in the classroom and using it outside of the classroom ...and you learn more when you're involved in activities outside of class, um I just think it's the best experience that you could have. I don't really know how to define that.

I was hoping to get good descriptions of their meaningful learning experiences. One series of questions in the second interview protocol centered on discovering the best in-class and best out-of-class educational experiences. I had anticipated these questions would result in finding some commonalities across the siloed divisions of student affairs and academic affairs.

By the next to last interview, I asked Molly about the interview as a chance to share what she experienced, especially out-of-class:

Interviewer: I asked you earlier about lessons that you learned in the classroom and lessons you learn out of the classroom. For in classroom, you answered pretty quickly. But for out-of-classroom you really had to stop and think. And I was wondering why you think you had to think about it so long as compared to being asked about classroom experiences so quickly?

Molly: I think because I'm not used to it. I've been in the classroom since, of course, kindergarten, and I think I just became used to it and it became

a routine, and I knew exactly what I was doing. But with outside of the classroom it's not routine. I'm not so used to it at all. Plus I'd add on to that and say that out of the classroom there's much more. I mean it's just a wide variety. You could do anything, anyway. So I think you have to think on all your past experiences, and that's usually a lot to think about whereas the classroom is structured and routine and you could pretty much count on it year after year.

This confirmed what I was thinking – that we do not give students the chance to make meaning of their out-of-class experiences. In Student Affairs, we may do evaluations and assessment, most of which center of quantitative surveys, but we do not employ exams, papers or even presentations that allow students to get their head around their experiences – especially experiences that could result in significant change such as community service trips, mentoring and leadership programs, residence life and so on. Baxter-Magolda (1992, 2003) argues for the chance for students to reflect, but few of us practitioners truly apply these ideas for the sake of efficiency. This is certainly something that we need to implement as a means of discovering what our students are learning; hopefully, this learning leads to development in our students.

Reflections on Professional Practice

In my professional practice, I found that we do not engage students in meaning making on a regular basis, but we also overlook the significance of some out-of-class experiences deemed insignificant. For example, at a faculty development day on campus, a nationally recognized leader in First Year

Experience seminars was guiding a discussion among the faculty and staff. The discussion turned to out-of-class experiences that contribute to student learning. One of the events of our ski club was mentioned in passing, the annual trip to an out-of-state resort. The fundamental purpose of the trip is to offer club members the chance to ski more challenging slopes than those available in the local area. This event was dismissed as a “just for fun” activity, good for building social connections and even retention, but not necessarily tied to learning. However, I argued that trips such as these can lead to other important outcomes, including learning outcomes. Yet we do not really know because we do not: 1) assess the out-of-class experience in terms of outcomes; and 2) ask our students to reflect on their experiences. For instance, conversations held during van trips can often turn out to be very educational due in part to the relaxed nature of the trip and the informal relationships between the adult mentors and the students.

Reflecting on a personal experience I had as college student demonstrates why we should not take for granted any educational moment. I was a softball player. My senior year we were coming home in a van from a road game. I was sitting in the front passenger seat while my coach was driving. The discussion we had did not focus on the games we had won but rather on my moral decision-making about my religious beliefs, team leadership and alcohol consumption (even though I was the legal age). To have my coach challenge my ethics in the context of my team leadership continues to be a guiding plank of my leadership framework as a student affairs practitioner. I now mentor student staff with whom I form close relationships. At our end of semester dinners, there is always

the opportunity for me to drink in the presence of my student staff. I choose not to; while I know that others in my position do, the conversation with my coach always reminds me of the image I want to portray as a leader. The opportunities for deep learning abound, we just have to take the time to recognize them and allow students to process them.

Reflections on Data Analysis

After I finished the interviews, I started to try to make sense out of all my data. It was difficult not to get side-tracked by some interesting avenues such as how the participants became highly involved in their activities: how they moved from being on the outlying edges of their groups to becoming leaders. I couldn't help but wonder why these four students rose to positions of leadership while the majority of their counterparts did not. Additionally, I briefly pondered the different types of involvement that the students seemed to experience during their four years. The following excerpt is from a memo during my early analysis:

As I looked through the data, I realized a couple of things. One of the things is that the students all referred to different outcomes of involvement or different levels or planes. Not sure right now how to describe it.

Currently I am using the following: Social involvement, learning involvement and transformative experience [perhaps I should say transformative involvement to be consistent]. Social involvement signifies students participating in activities with friends, for the purpose of enjoyment and socializing on campus. I define these as things like the students activities scheduled for campus such as magicians and concerts or

recreational type clubs. They are important because they do bring students together, and they do make connections within and across groups. The second level is learning involvement. These are activities that are intentional and do result in some learning. For instance, several participants talked about what they learned as club presidents about budgets and planning meetings. Useful skills added to their educational experience. The third type is the transformational. At first, I thought transformative experiences were individual types of experiences. But now I see it more as summative experiences. And that individual experiences are what I am calling challenge experiences described below. The transformative involvement or level results in meaningful and potentially lasting impact and change among the participants. This is the type I am most interested in because it exists and we really haven't identified it yet – but I know it is there. I know because I can see the physical reaction of students change when they talk about these events. A couple of the participants speech patterns change, you can feel their excitement. But these aren't necessarily singular experiences, more a sum of experiences and conditions. And students are moving from type or level and leaving the other. It is more fluid, sort of like a multi-level mall with escalators that shoppers go up and down continuously to get from one store to another.

After several missteps and side-steps, I reminded myself to go back to my research question: how students make meaning of their out-of-class educational

experiences. I refocused on the nodes that I had labeled “transformative” or experiences that seemed to make a difference in the lives of the participants.

Once I gathered all their comments together about their transformative experiences, I narrowed my focus on what I labeled “turning points”. These turning points were specific experiences that, for the participants, took on saliency beyond one context. After reading through these experiences several times, I organized them into two categories: external and internal turning points. The external turning points focused on how the participants’ worldview changed as a result of their experiences. The internal turning points focused on their self view and their ethical or moral reasoning, especially as members of peer groups.

I think it is important to note that not all of the student participants’ experiences were of the same type. Below is a general summary of their types of involvement:

- Two participants were athletes; one in NCAA sanctioned sports, the other in a club sport.
- Two were in a 4-year leadership program.
- One was in the honor’s program (academic, not the honor society mentioned previously).
- Three were club executives at some point; the other was a team captain. Two had participated with the Student Government Association (SGA) for one year.
- All four were commuters (The College is over 80% commuter, so this was common).

- Three received awards for their involvement outside of The College.
- Three did community service; one locally, two abroad through club trips.

Based on their types of experience, I wasn't able to conclude that one specific out-of-class activity or program resulted in the turning points; it was more a matter of the circumstances their experiences contained. I identified several of these conditions in another memo contained in Appendix C: Memo on Conditions.

Reflections on Making Meaning of the Data

Thinking about creating or at least providing opportunities for students to have significant out-of-class educational experiences calls important questions to my practitioner mind: Is the path leading to turning points simply creating the right conditions? If so, do we shift our recourses to the activities that match these conditions? What about the importance of social engagement on retention? Do we eliminate activities that don't yield turning points? How do we know if students are having turning points?

I think there is more to the puzzle than creating the right conditions. I think that students can be engaged or involved in the "right" kind of activities, yet not experience turning points. For instance, I know a student who was resident advisor, a SGA member, and a club president, did community service, and had many of the same experiences as the participants in this study. Because she was one of my staff members and took on a position of leadership, I had many opportunities to discuss her experiences. Yet, she doesn't appear to have had a significant turning point based on our conversations and my observation of her

behavior. Why? She was an older student by a couple of years and a transfer. Did these variables change or minimize her chance to have turning point experiences?

This anecdotal example also makes me think back to Astin's (1993) arguments about college age development: will students develop whether in college or not? Do they develop differently because they are in college? Astin isn't sure whether this can ever be answered in a rigorous manner because there are so many different experiences involved. It does, however, call me to consider whether all students have turning points and, if not, why not? Are we as practitioners called on to provide every student with the opportunity to have turning point experiences? Would the students develop their insights from their turning points without the experiences they had? Would a different set of experiences yield the same learning? Perhaps these are questions for future study, tied to practical application of this research. One of the challenging realities in the practice of working with college students is that you can provide opportunities for students, but you cannot control a student's involvement level or the individual impact of the experiences provided. Students have "free will" in their college experiences – often to the chagrin of many parents and educators.

Another thing I discovered was that the students were not cognizant of their own turning points in terms of realizing this was a significant learning moment for them. It seemed to be common that they never or rarely had the opportunity to reflect on their out-of-class experiences. To some extent this ties into the lack of meaningful assessment common in student affairs, but it also

points out that we are not maximizing the learning opportunities we offer students because we don't offer or require students to reflect on their experiences.

In my own professional practice, when I have lead service trips I have also included at least one period of time during each day for reflection and discussion, what we used to call "debriefing." I knew this was important and led to deeper understanding and change as a result because of my own high school and college experiences and as a professional practitioner. For instance, one service trip I led a group of high school students to an isolated Native American reservation to rehab a building and provide a summer program for the children in the community. This was a highly divergent cultural experience for the students, who all came from middle and upper middle-class suburbs. Without the opportunity for the students to write reflectively and discuss what they were experiencing, they probably would not have been able to make sense of it. Likewise, as a college professional overseeing resident life, we use reflection and discussion regularly to improve the work of our college-student staff. From discussing one specific instance, the student staff is able to extrapolate what they have learned and apply it to another, different experience. However, as a coach I have not had designed opportunities for my players to reflect on their experiences, nor have I had reflective conversations with players, especially leaders of the team who were often in positions similar to those I experienced in my college days. Additional implications will be discussed in Chapter 6.

This chapter has documented how I, as a researcher and practitioner, have come to make my own meaning and understanding of the out-of-class educational

experiences of the participants. Through this process, I examined how I conducted the research as well as why. My reflections have lead me to conclude that not only do our students need the chance to reflect on their experiences to make meaning of them, they need the opportunity to recognize they have changed, learned, or grown as a result of these experiences. Chapter 6 will serve to situate my conclusions within the context of other research on how students make meaning of their experiences.

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

The participants in this study described various types of out-of-class educational experiences. However, as noted in Chapters 4 and 5, each participant experienced significant events, labeled turning points, that impacted the way they view and understand their world.

This chapter will locate the outcomes of the participants' experiences within the existing body of research primarily presented in Chapter Two, recognize limitations, and offer suggestions for researchers and practitioners.

As previously explained, although much attention has been paid to student learning, little or no research exists qualifying students' out-of-class educational experiences. The research that does exist either limits out-of-class learning to affiliations with class room learning and practices, or narrowly focuses on one area of out-of-class such as residential living, athletics, or Greek Life. This research study attempted to examine students' out-of-class educational experiences holistically by exploring how students make meaning of these experiences.

Findings

This research study centers on the question, "How students make meaning of their intentional out-of-class." A much simpler question would have been, "What do students learn from their intentional out-of-class?" However, to answer the first question, answers to the second one inevitably rise to the surface.

As discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, I discovered that the participants arrived at significant turning points, events that challenged their existing concepts of their

realities. These turning points were categorized as internal or external, differentiating between gains in understanding of self and the world, respectively. It is important to recognize that these experiences were not necessarily neatly wrapped up in one event, location, or program. Some were sums of events such as athletic participation on multiple teams; others were experiences that literally took the participants out of their normal comfort zone to a new environment in a foreign country. These were powerful experiences for the participants, powerful enough to impact their worldview and self-understanding, such as when Jack identified a change to how he understands others' personal religious experiences. Table 11, *Comparisons of Turning Point Outcomes with Other Outcomes*, offers a comparison between the turning point outcomes identified in this study with expectations of employers as identified by Bresciani, Zelna and Anderson (2004) and the six liberal learning outcomes identified by The College. The table shows the mapping of the turning point outcomes to the outcomes identified by The College and Bresciani, Zelna and Anderson.

Table 11

Comparisons of Turning Point Outcomes with Other Outcomes

Participant	External Turning Points Outcomes	Internal Turning Points Outcomes	Desired Outcomes for Employers	The College's Liberal Learning Outcomes
Mario	Power of involvement in community service (O-1, 4, 6, 9)	Leaders impact change Importance of personal consistency (O-3, H-3)	O-1 Global literacy;	H-1 Advanced core skills;
Jack	Acceptance of alternative religious differences (H-2)	Personal ethical decision making (H-3, O-3)	O-2 Accelerated technology;	H-2 Intercultural awareness and openness to diversity;
Molly	Impact of work on others How to work with diverse co-workers (O-8, H-2,4)	Self-confidence	O-3 Social ethics and social responsibility;	H-3 Effective reasoning and problem-solving that transcends disciplinary boundaries;
Rachel	Cross-cultural understanding (H-2, O-8)	Self-contentment (H-6)	O-4 Organizational networking;	H-4 Advanced research skills;
			O-5 Expanding diverse consumer markets;	H-5 Integrated learning, collaborative work in analytical and experiential learning;
			O-6 Empowerment-orientated training and policy;	H-6 Examined life and life-long learning including self-renewal.
			O-7 Analysis of process barriers to goal attainment;	(Hilbert College, 2010)
			O-8 Multicultural communities and organizations;	
			O-9 Understanding of teamwork in organizations;	
			O-10 A fundamental understanding of the operations and assessment associated with quality and effectiveness;	
			O-11 Use of problem-solving in	

different settings
and contexts; and

O-12 Development
of general,
specific, and
contextual
communication
skills.

(Breschiani, Zelna
& Anderson, 2004)

Another set of outcomes that is worth noting relate to civic engagement. In addition to outcomes associated with processes related to a governmental structure, Hurtado, Engberg, Ponjuan and Landreman (2002) also explored how college experiences change students' "ability to see the world from someone's perspective,"(p. 163) as part of the *Preparing Students for a Diverse Democracy* project. The outcome identified by Hurtado et al. (2002) appears to be a central accomplishment of the participants of this study. Similar to Breschiani, Zelna, and Anderson (2004), Hurtado, Engbert and Ponjuan (2003) draw a relationship between their learning outcomes with competencies new college graduates need to be productive citizens such as "the ability to work effectively in groups composed of diverse individuals, openness to new ideas and perspectives, and empathy toward other worker's perspectives" (p. 3).

Additionally, these gains in outcomes parallel gains reported through the CIRP College Senior Survey (CSS) for 2007, the same year that the participants from this study graduated. For example, 80.9 percent of the participants in the CSS reported to be stronger in "understanding social problems facing our nation," while 74.7 percent reported to be strong in "understanding the problems facing

your community” (Spinosa, Sharkness, Pryor, Liu, 2008, p. 15). The same participants also indicated a 13.3 percent gain in self concept (Spinosa et al., 2008). While not a quantitative measure, the statements made by the participants in this study align with these net gains from the CSS.

Returning to the question of this study, the simple answer is, students do not necessarily making meaning of the out-of-class without some type of processing. This is one of the findings discussed in Chapter 5 as part of the research reflection and that are reviewed below.

First, learning is messy, which makes it difficult to research. Most research designs require examining learning from one or a few variables. Yet the variables and combinations of variables impacting learning are as numerous as the number of college students attending colleges and universities. Researchers have had to narrow projects to a manageable number of variables and control for different contexts in order to demonstrate some predictive power. However, predicting college student success, such as GPA or time to graduation, continues to baffle most institutions in terms of isolating a specific cause and effect. Learning is not segmented, as demonstrated by the students in this study as well as reflected in *Learning Reconsidered 2* (Keeling 2006). Perhaps a better model for understanding learning is as a web of interconnected experiences, with occasional breaks in the web. Not every web looks identical, yet yields similar results.

Second, college students lack the appropriate contextual knowledge and language to talk about their out-of-class experiences. Molly recognized that she

only had traditional learning language to talk about her out-of-class experiences, and that perhaps, was not adequate. When asked about why she had to think more about her out-of-class experiences compared to her classroom experiences, Molly replied:

I think because I'm not used to it. I've been in the classroom since of course kindergarten and I think I just became use to it and it became a routine. And I knew exactly what I was doing but with outside of the classroom it's not routine. I'm not so use to it at all. Plus I'd add on to that and say that out of the classroom there's much more. I mean it's just a wide variety. You could do anything any way. So I think you have to think on all your past experiences and that's usually a lot to think about.

Whereas the classroom is structured and routine and you could pretty much count on it year after year.

This leaves scholars and practitioners in a quandary. How can learning silos be struck down without a common langue to integrate the two domains, and yet in order to create a seamless experience, understanding out-of -class learning is limited by students', faculty and staff because the only language used to describe it is from a different context. The student learning assessment movement offers the most practical language bridge at this point.

Third, the variables currently related to impactful student learning, such as the right institutional conditions or the right out-of-class activities, do not necessarily result in students' making meaning of their experiences. Students are still unsuccessful in our top rated colleges and universities, and students in

leadership positions may have visible skills yet lack the ability to work well with those possessing divergent views.

Consequently, and finally, there seems to be a relationship in making meaning of out-of-class and the opportunity to process or reflect on those experiences. The reflective practice is not just a recitation of what the student experienced, but how they accommodated the information into their own perceptions of the world around them. One of the weaknesses of this research design is that the interview process itself engaged the participants in reflective thinking, thus potentially influencing the results. Additional limits of this study will be discussed later in this chapter.

Locating the Findings in the Literature

Although Astin's (1993) work lays the foundation for the still-evolving theory of engagement as mentioned in Chapter 5, Astin also questioned whether college students change so dramatically as a result of the college experience itself or whether other experiences outside of college would have similar impact. For instance, developmental psychologists have identified periods in human development when individuals are more sensitive to acquiring new skills. Language is often associated with a sensitive period before year two of human development. Labouvie-Vief (as cited in Berger, 2010) recognized “emerging adulthood” as a vital development time because “complex, critical, and relativizing thinking emerges only in the 20’s” (p. 396). Furthermore, T. E. Miller (cited in Berger, 2010) centered on the cognitive flexibility of young adults as demonstrated by the often changing academic plans of traditional age college

students, often based on feedback from peers and academic mentors. Furthermore, King and Baxter Magolda (1999) also recognized that students' ability to make meaning out of their experiences increases in a developmental progression.

Since the participants in this study represent traditional-age college students, those commonly 18-23 years old, Astin's (1993) point becomes a legitimate consideration. It is possible that humans are wired to experience cognitive flexibility during emerging adulthood, which could explain the participants' changes in both their internal and external understandings. However, would these college students have arrived at turning points in another environment? Or is the college experience more powerful than others as a result of the combination of advances in cognitive gains resulting from studies and in the ability to develop multiple perspectives (Perry, 1970, as cited in Berger, 2010), as well as the opportunity to participate in unique experiences associated with co-curricular activities?

The cognitive readiness and developmental milestones of traditional age college students may provide one reason for the powerful impact of the experiences these participants had. Generally speaking, the ability to become flexible thinkers is a hallmark of college learning and is developed both in and out of the classroom (Berger, 2010). Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) indicate "we uncovered a substantial body of evidence indicating that the nature of students' social and co-curricular involvement plays a unique role of some consequence in their general cognitive development" (p. 2008). Clearly the participants spent substantial time engaged in out-of-class activities, most of them centered on

interactions with their peers, another powerful aspect of cognitive development (Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005).

The core principle of engagement may play a more dominant role in understanding the outcomes of this study. The crux of engagement theory is the relationship between student time spent on educationally purposeful activities and increased or improved learning. Educationally purposeful activities are defined as “undergraduate activities, events, and experiences that are congruent with the institution's educational purposes and a student’s own educational aspirations” (Kuh, 1996, as cited in Kuh, et al, 2002). Simply stated, research on student engagement is designed to tell us how much effort students are putting into their college work. The theory, built on Pace’s (1979) and Astin’s (1993) work assumes that greater involvement leads to greater learning. The theory beckons us to recall our parents telling us things such as “the more you practice, the better you get.”

In examining how much effort or time the participants put into their co-curricular experiences, each advanced from a novice in their respective activity domains to leadership, although the length of time needed to achieve this varied among the individuals. For example, Mario became a leader very quickly due to the lack of leadership on his team. The other participants rose to official leadership as team captains and club officers more slowly. All the participants spent significant time in activities that did not seem to have the same meaningful impact as the turning points described in Chapter 4. Therefore, the basic principle

of involvement or student effort does not adequately account for the experiences of these participants.

In relation to this research study, one of the selection criteria for participation included significant out-of-class involvement as defined by admittance into the honor society of The College. For example, two of the participants were involved in athletics, while all four were involved in clubs and honor societies. Their involvement was marked not just by time, but also quality, defined as a leadership role such as a team captain or club president. Although not all the participants were engaged in clubs or activities that directly supported their academic disciplines, they all interacted with faculty and staff outside of the classroom to a greater extent than many of their peers who chose not to be engaged.

Kuh and colleagues (2005) took Astin's theory of involvement (1993) and expanded the theory to look not only at the student effort variable, but also the role of institutional factors. Over the last several decades, Kuh and associates have collected vast amounts of data, both qualitative and quantitative. The expanding history of the engagement research paradigm can be represented in a simple cycle of quantified and qualified research as depicted in Figure 1.

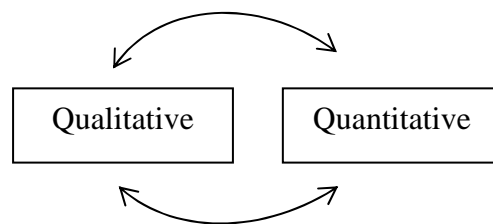


Figure 1 The Research Cycle

This process is represented in the relationship between *Involving Colleges*, NSSE, and Project DEEP, which all point to the significance of institutional practices, policies, and other factors that yield successful educational outcomes in students. The result of this work concludes that “culture matters” at institutions (Kuh et al, 2005). In comparing the guiding principles for promoting student success to the college environment, several questions come to mind such as: Was there a relationship between institutional conditions and student success impacting the emergence of the turning points identified in this research study? For example, the institutional culture of The College at the time of the participants’ attendance did not intentionally focus on student success issues, but was experiencing several philosophical transitions such as adopting a liberal education paradigm and adopting an institutional perspective on retention.

Likewise, one of the draw backs of examining this relationship is that most traditional measures of success are associated with classroom related gains such as GPA. Terenzini, Pascarella, and Blimling noted in 1996 that “Substantially less is known about how students’ out-of-class experiences impact their academic, intellectual, or cognitive development” (p. 149). As noted in Chapter Two, assessment in student affairs has served to help advance the measurement of gains in these areas in the co-curricular context. However, at the time of the interviews with the participants in this study, The College possessed no formal assessment processes, either for academics or student affairs. Virtually no data was kept on co-curricular experiences besides basic participation rates.

Within the data collected through the engagement research projects, a plethora of variables can be isolated and examined to determine their power in the student success process. One of the variables examined by Kezar (2006) was institutional size using NSSE data on four of the five benchmarks (faculty-student interaction, active and collaborative learning, academic challenges and supportive educational environment) and organizational theory relating to size of the institution. Kezar found that smaller institutions tended to be more mission minded and focused on values and philosophy to encourage student engagement and acculturate new faculty. In addition, although both large and small colleges may utilize similar programs and practices, their effectiveness for student engagement varied depending on size. For instance, the role of learning communities as a means for engaging students at large institutions was deemed more crucial than for the smaller colleges. Basically, Kezar found that size does matter in relation to student engagement; however, it depends on how institutions create engagement opportunities for students. Perhaps, due to the size of The College, under 1000 FTE, the participants were able to reach these turning points without much intentional or coordinated effort. In contrast, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) found no real difference in the association of student success to institutional size. However, that may be due to the fact that larger institutions often subdivide the student population into units or programs that are likely to increase student peer and mentor interaction, such as through learning communities, interest groups, and colleges within universities. It is also worth noting in relation to size that The College is primarily a commuter college; only

about 150 students lived on campus during the study and none of the participants were campus residents.

After interviewing the participants it became apparent that they had not formally engaged in any applied, critical or reflective thinking on their out-of-class experiences. One of the problems identified was language. Molly's statement regarding language related to out-of-class learning detailed previously in this chapter calls to light several associations. Perhaps the most obvious speaks directly to the foundational concepts of learning adaptations of assimilation and accommodation espoused by Piaget (as cited in Berger, 2010). As we learn and experience new things, we organize them or assimilate them with our existing ideas; we make sense of new experiences by relating them to what we already know. Additionally, if our new experiences or learning do not exactly fit our existing schema, we accommodate or reorganize them. It is these experiences that are turning points; the "Aha" experiences that lead to intellectual growth through accommodation which requires great cognitive effort. This study seems to indicate that intentional reflection is needed to help participants assimilate and accommodate their experiences; the experiences alone cannot necessarily drive meaning making.

Baxter Magolda's (1992) research has centered on the development of self-authorship, which examines complex reasoning identified through a continuum of ways of knowing including: absolute knowing, transitional knowing, independent knowing, and contextual knowing (Baxter Magolda, 1992 as cited in Love & Guthrie, 1999). Baxter Magolda recognized that students'

transition through and within the continuum during and beyond their college experience. This theory is applicable in that it describes how students arrive at decisions. For instance, the transition from independent knowing to contextual knowing may relate to moments where the participants in this study began to shift their understanding of the world. Love and Guthrie (1999) describe this as “the questioning that began in the transitional knowing serves as an important foundation for understanding the validity of others’ ideas and expertise and for understanding the implications of decisions that are made in a particular context” (p. 36). Rachel demonstrated this type of knowing when she discussed the need to be contextually aware as a psychology major:

being a psychology major, I have to think about working with the different groups of people. And you can learn that in a classroom, that you’re going to have different cultures with other people, that I may be working with differences, but going to the Bahamas was probably the biggest experience because I actually had to get involved with a different culture.

Although there are some similarities between this study and the work of Baxter Magolda, she primarily explored pattern differences between men and women. Baxter Magolda also advocates for the application of reflective practices which will be discussed later in this chapter.

Another interesting point expressed by Molly centers on the expansive opportunities available outside of the classroom compared to the structured routine of the academic sequence. The out-of-class experiences possess an unknown factor for students due to the greater variety of activities and contexts

compared to the classroom. Perhaps it is this newness and variety in events such as student government, athletics, clubs, service events, and so forth, that draw students to participate. It appears that the significant changes come in the turning point context.

Clearly, the findings from this study represent the complexity of attempting to understand the college student experience, especially as students attempt to make sense of the amalgamation of their experiences, both in- and out-of-class. While this project attempted to approach the student educational experience holistically as opposed to isolating a specific variable, such as level of engagement, the results are not necessarily precise for predicting student outcomes or attainments; additional research is needed.

Limitations

The number of participants in this study is a limitation, as is the homogeneous nature of the participants in terms of their membership in a campus honor society that requires strong academic and out-of-class performance. The emergence of turning points may not be so obvious in students who are only minimally engaged out of the classroom or who are lower achieving students. However that is an option for further research.

Another limitation is that the campus context was a small, private, religiously affiliated college that not only touted being student-centered, but had such a reputation among non-attenders. It would be difficult to extrapolate the findings from this study to another campus, especially a large, research focused institution.

Finally, the study could have been enhanced by employing a longitudinal design, following the participants throughout their time at The College as opposed to collecting data after they had graduated. A longitudinal design could allow for data collection at the specific time a student had an experience as well as after graduation. This would perhaps bring more delineation to the topic, as well as allow the opportunity to engage participants in additional reflection, resulting in a clearer picture of how they make meaning of their out-of-class.

Implications for Practice

Despite the limitations, this research study highlights the need for making changes in student affairs practice. First, student affairs practitioners need to integrate an opportunity for students to make sense of what they experience and learn outside of the classroom, not just for assessment purposes, but as part of an intentional educational process. One of the tangential discoveries of this study was that the participants had the opportunity to begin to make meaning of their experiences through the interview process. I believe we have an untapped universe of learning for students outside of the class. This learning is related to higher ordered cognitive processes as opposed to basic skills, the types of abilities employers desire in their workers such as multicultural flexibility, problem solving in multiple contexts, and organizational networking (Bresciani, Zelna & Anderson, 2004). There are ways for practitioners to implement reflective practices into daily experiences. For instance, an advisor to a student government association required officers to keep a reflective journal that is submitted bi-weekly. Simple rubrics have been designed to provide quick feedback to the

officers. The journals guide leadership development among the officers as well as help them develop a common set of priorities as a leadership team (Whiffen, 2010).

Realistically, incorporating reflective practice is a huge challenge in terms of time and attention of students. The classroom context obviously benefits in having a captured or required audience, unlike out-of-class. However, the assessment movement has provided new tools for practitioners, such as the one minute paper that can be adapted for out of class use. Technology offers unique ways for students to express what they are learning through various forms of media; for example, reports from student organizations or leadership programs could utilize multi-media tools to move beyond regurgitating what was accomplished to include a reflection through pictures, digital images, music and reflective writing to provide a comprehensive snapshot of what students are learning. The challenge lies in selecting techniques that excite students to engage in these processes by reaching out to their digital world as opposed to traditions of old.

Second, differentiating between learning contexts or environments seems to be a problem when addressing student learning. Keeling (2006) notes that students do not view their learning experiences as segregated silos. Terenzini, Pascarella and Blimling (1996) affirm that out-of-class experiences are probably more powerful than most faculty and student affairs staff members realize. Student affairs practitioners need to free learning language from a classroom-only

context by incorporating new terms and redefining old ones to help students recognize their significant learning achievements outside of the classroom.

Instead of persisting to define learning in terms of either classroom or out-of-classroom contexts, academic and student affairs practitioners need to work collaboratively to advance assessment capabilities to capture learning throughout college as a summative experience as opposed to a segmented one. Students should be encouraged to reflect across their curriculum, in the class and beyond. This collaborative, holistic approach is attuned more to the student way of learning and prepares students for merging classroom content, cognitive capabilities, and life management skills in order to excel in their future endeavors.

Recommendations for Further Research

This small study has confirmed what many practitioners believe: out-of-class educational experiences are beneficial and powerful. However, it is just the tip of the iceberg in understanding what and how students make sense of these. One stream of additional research that is needed to shed more light on out-of-class student educational experiences relates to exploring the impact of different combinations of experiences: What activities and processes lead to deep meaning if students are given the chance to make sense of their experiences through reflective practices? Or are some experiences more powerful than others? If so, how do we get more students involved in these traditionally optional? This is a crucial topic for further study as it has the potential to dramatically impact the practice managing and designing of out-of-class educational experiences.

A second stream of research needs to examine how to assess the sum of individual student experiences as opposed to parsing out learning in distinctive contexts. The liberal education movement values the summative academic experience. Expanding this model to provide a more holistic approach could yield a more powerful understanding of student learning. Another avenue for exploration not addressed in this study is the impact of turning points that reflect negative experiences or outcomes such as those leading a student to depart from a college or university. Finally, additional research needs to explore the advanced cognitive gains of students engaged outside of the classroom against those of students who are not attending college. This correlates to Astin's (1993) consideration that traditional age college students are primed for cognitive development, whether in college or not.

Conclusion

This research study focused on exploring how students make meaning of their out-of-class. The primary focus of discussion centered on the turning points the student experienced, both internal and external. It was also discovered that the participants rarely had the opportunity to reflect on their co-curricular experiences which may have limited what they ultimately learned from their.

In 1937, the Student Personnel Point of View (SPPV) emerged as a foundational document in co-curricular education (Brown, 1972). The SPPV advocated that colleges attend to holistic learning and that student personnel workers play a more educational role as opposed to being a manager of students (Evans, Forney, Guido-DiBrito, 1998). Seventy some years later, scholar-

practitioners in student affairs continue to affirm these early foundations yet have struggled to apply them to daily practice. This is demonstrated through a recent meeting that drew together faculty, staff and community members to collaborate on a project to gather data on the experiences of youth in the local community. One of the discussions centered on utilizing students from the college as scribes and facilitators through a classroom related community service option, commonly called *service learning*. One of the community members, who happened to be on staff at another nearby college, was adamant that the students must participate in service learning affiliated with a specific course; this person felt that otherwise the experience would lack rigor and meaning. A brief lecture on service learning versus community service followed. This professional, who works to bridge the gap between in-class and out-of-class experiences, failed to recognize the opportunity to be engaged in “both/and” thinking and instead advocated for an “either/or” approach. This personal experience accentuates the persistent dualistic approach within higher education as described by Love and Estanek (2004). Even a professional who has spent time learning and working in the co-curricular arena brought into the discussion the erroneous notion that learning is most effectively tied to the classroom, ignoring our own experiences with our students and those of the students themselves.

The academic community continues to develop educational programs and activities that attempt to mimic what happens in the co-curricular arena such as service learning, learning communities, and activities day (a unique program at a community college that allows for professors to design special learning

opportunities beyond the classroom). The challenge with current collaborations is that because of the dominance of the dualistic, either/or model of learning, there is often an imbalance between academic ventures and student affairs. The call to student affair practitioners should not be to simply collaborate with faculty more or link engagement in the co-curricular to the curricular, but to create opportunities for students to engage in meaning-making and measure and document their process and progress.

Learning is powerful even without course credit, as demonstrated in this study. The traditional model of higher education continues to revolve around course content at a time when employers are looking for workers not just with content knowledge but also applied knowledge and the ability to transcend multiple contextual environments. The college community lies entrenched in either/or thinking (Love & Estanek, 2004) where value is college credits or earnings as opposed to learning for development and improving life-long abilities. It is time we employ the “both/and” model to provide a more holistic education. Today’s student affairs scholar-practitioners have a unique opportunity to advance the knowledge and understanding of college students by applying reflective practices and assessment measures to out-of-class educational experiences to empirically demonstrate the value of diverse college experiences for students as they matriculate and as they move into life and employment after college.

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APPENDIX A

SAMPLE PARTICIPANT INFORMATIONAL LETTER

Study Title

Date

Dear _____:

I am a graduate student under the direction of Professor Kris Ewing in the College of Education, in the Higher and Postsecondary Education doctoral program at Arizona State University. I also work at [The College] in Residence Life. I am conducting a research study to explore student learning and development experiences beyond the traditional context of classroom learning from the students' perspective.

I am inviting your participation, which will involve 1 or 2 interviews that will last about 1 hour each. These interviews will ask you to share your learning experiences at [The College] specifically targeting outside classroom learning. Since we sometimes think of things after we discuss them, you will also have the opportunity to provide additional feedback with text messaging or emails. You have the right not to answer any question, and to stop the interview at any time.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty.

The information you provide about your learning experiences will be a powerful tool in helping to fully understand college students' learning experiences, especially outside of the classroom. This knowledge will help educators and administrators to create better experiences for students. There are no foreseeable risks to your participation.

I would like to audiotape this interview. The interview will not be recorded without your permission. If you give permission for this interview to be recorded, you have the right to ask for the recording to be stopped. Please indicate whether you give permission for the interview to be recorded.

In order to maintain confidentiality of your records, Kerry Levett, the investigator, will assign you an alias so as not to personally identify you. Additional identifiers, such as your hometown will not be included in your narrative. Transcripts of your interviews and your narratives will be kept in both written and electronic formats. Written files will be secured in a locked filing cabinet, while electronic files (both written and audio) will be stored on a secure server with a backup copy on a jump drive. Audio files will be destroyed after a period of no more than 10 years.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please contact the research team at: 716-348-6226. You can text message to this number as well. If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the ASU Research Compliance Office, at (480) 965-6788.

APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Interview Protocol: Round 1

Participant Interview:

Date:

Location:

Introduction: I am interested in discovering how college students learning through their experiences. There has been a lot of research on classroom learning such as comparing grades or GPAs. I am interested in learning what happens beyond the classroom through the experiences you've had here at Hilbert College. The questions that I am going to ask you focus on your out of class experiences. Please feel free to ask me to clarify a question if you don't understand what I am asking.

Tell me about your college experience.

Probing Question: Share with me your best experience. What was your worst?

Why did you want to go to Hilbert as a freshman?

Probing question: Are those reasons still valid?

How have you changed or grown over the last 4 years?

Probing question: Did you become the person you thought would become when you started college?

What have you learned during college that will be most helpful to you after you graduate?

Probing question:

Who are your communities with Hilbert – the people/groups you spent time with? How were they formed?

What did you learn from these people or being in these groups?

What would you have done differently during your college years? Why?

If you were to create a new billboard for Hilbert to describe your experience, what would you create?

Probing question: What do you think is the best word to describe your Hilbert experience?

Contextual notes:

Interview Protocol: Round 2

Why did you initially get involved in an out of classroom activity or experience such as athletics, clubs, etc/? Why did you continue to be involved?

Can you describe how what you have learned in the classroom is similar or different to what you have learned outside of the classroom?

Here is a map of the college. Mark every location where you learned something?

What did you learn at each of these locations?

Would you please describe what you have learned in the classroom?

How have you used or applied this knowledge/information?

Please share some lessons you learned out of the classroom.

How have you used or applied this knowledge/information?

Define or describe learning that does not take place in the classroom. What would you call it?

How would you define it?

Please identify and describe the significant people in your experiences out of the classroom.

These people could be faculty, staff, peers and family/adults (e.g. employer, Minister, friend, care provider etc.).

Why are they significant?

What differentiates them from others?

How have they contributed to your success?

Please describe the best classroom learning experience?

How would you describe the best out of classroom learning experiences?

How do faculty and/or staff impact these experiences?

Is there anything else you wish to share?

APPENDIX C

MEMO ON CONDITIONS

“It is within this transformational involvement that I have identified four links. I am calling them links because I see the sum experience like a chain link fence, and each individual experience is one link. By itself or with a few links, it doesn’t do much. But with a group of links together it is a strong fence. Together, these individual experiences or conditions create a strong fence or a strong, transformative experience. One of the other things is that the links consist of four types, and each student’s summative experience can take on a different pattern of links, because their individual experiences are so different. One of things I don’t like about some of the student development theories is that they are so prescriptive, there is limited flexibility. Even at a small college like The College, it is amazing how much diversity of experiences exists among the four participants.

These conditions include the following: Challenge experiences, interacting with others, interacting with guides, and opportunities for making sense.

Challenge experiences: The first term I used was “intentional” out-of-class experiences (OOCEs – I am trying to find a unique label for these). I changed the concept to challenge because not all intentional OOCEs are the same. In fact, intentional is almost too casual for the type of experiences the students were describing. For example, student activities, resident programming, club events can all be intentional, even purposeful– they are planned and executed for a specific purpose that may even include a learning component. But the impact on students is minimal. Again, I go back to the participants talking about their experiences with SGA. Much of SGA and club work is very intentional, including training for members. However, these students did not seem personally impacted by SGA at The College. They did learn from SGA as

mentioned previously, however, not to the same extent as with other experiences. Challenge experiences require students to attempt to achieve beyond their expectations. For most of these students, they did achieve beyond expectations which makes them remarkable for The College's underachieving, non-selective population. The College does not typically get the best and brightest students, but more the B and C students or the athletes that can't get a scholarship somewhere else. But there are these pockets of students that are challenged by people, places and events. For instance, our Students in Free Enterprise (SIFE) club is one of the best in the nation, competing against highly selective colleges and universities around the country. By all accounts, our SIFE club should not be so successful. Likewise, our hockey club team has now won two conference championships against teams from schools 10 times our size. Not only that, but this group of young men has been raising a large amount of money for a couple of girls who have or had cancer. I draw a correlation between challenge experiences and the active, engaging learning that the students talked about in classroom experiences. They are both more difficult, more engaging and the outcomes are greater.

Interacting with people: I went back into the data and differentiated the types of interactions students were having with others. [I am flexible on finding more descriptive, rich labels for things and am open to suggestions]. The first one is "interacting with others." It seems that the students benefited greatly from interacting with people not tied to the college; at least three of the participants related several instances of these types of interactions. Often the interactions were with people they were working with through community service projects. These interactions bring a sense of the scope of the world to the very isolated students at The College. It is part "real world" learning, part world view

challenging.

Interactions with guides. I am every amenable to re-labeling this link “journeying with guides.” These are the staff and faculty that walk with the students through these experiences. They are coaches, teachers, parents and advisors that do more than chaperone. They help the student manage this transformative experience and are probably transformed themselves as well. They are the ones the lay the challenge experiences in front of the students and say “why can’t you do it?” They push, prod, remind and hold students accountable for their commitments.

The final link is “opportunities for making sense” of their experiences. This is the weakest link because it is the most underutilized, yet it is hard to be transformed without intentionally processing the experiences. I think about making sense of experiences in the way learning was described to me by my first educational psychology professor. He described learning as especially placing experiences on hooks in our brains. As we analyze and accommodate our experiences we either place them on existing hooks or create new hooks for unrecognized experiences. Making new hooks can be challenging because it means moving around the existing hooks, and even rearranging things to fit better. This is the transformative learning/involvement that I am interested in. Some of the participants had chances to figure out where their experiences go on their hooks and what new hooks they need. SIFE is a good example because they had to present their experiences in competition. Club reports and class papers are other examples. But as one participant noted, they just don’t have the language or formal chance to talk about their out-of-class experiences.”