

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PREFERENCES OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE
STUDENT AFFAIRS MID-LEVEL MANAGERS

by

Talia Lynn Koronkiewicz

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Has been approved

September 2016

APPROVED:

Susanne Fenske, PhD

Committee Chair

Laurie Chesley, EdD

Committee Member

Patrick Peyer, EdD

Committee Member

Leslie Frederick, EdD

Committee Member

Dissertation Committee

ACCEPTED:

Roberta C. Teahen, PhD, Director

Community College Leadership Program

ABSTRACT

Community colleges are in a transformational era, navigating issues including increased accountability for graduation rates and shrinking budgets. Student affairs professionals are further challenged with managing unstable enrollment numbers, changing student demographics, crisis response preparation, and supporting students to completion. Although student affairs mid-level managers play a vital role in developing and implementing college policy, this employee classification is often overlooked in regard to research studies. This research study identified the professional development preferences of community college student affairs mid-level managers. Selection factors and barriers associated with professional development were also explored.

Using a sequential, mixed methods design, data were collected in two phases. The first phase consisted of a quantitative survey distributed electronically to participants. Forty-eight (48) Illinois community college student affairs mid-level managers completed the survey. The second phase of the study utilized a qualitative approach. A confidential face-to-face interview was conducted with six (6) participants to explore the findings of the survey through one-on-one dialogue.

The study determined the value placed upon internal and external professional development offerings. Internal professional development refers to programs/activities coordinated by the participant's institution. External professional development refers to programs/activities not coordinated by the participant's institution, but may be

sponsored by the institution. Furthermore, five themes were revealed which span the entire study. Mid-level managers value (1) involvement in professional development, (2) professional relationships, (3) skill-building, (4) efficient use of time, and (5) college funding.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Community colleges are attracting national attention due to increased accountability for student completion rates, budget deficits, additional federal and state mandates, and a pending leadership crisis due to an increase in presidential retirements. Student affairs professionals are further challenged with managing unstable enrollment numbers, crisis response preparation, partnering with both K-12 and four-year institutions, and student success initiatives. Student affairs mid-level managers play a vital role in developing policy and carrying out college objectives. Mid-level managers are responsible for “executing functions that affect the daily lives of students and contribute significantly to the overall coordination of institutional resources and activities” (Belch & Strange, 1995, p. 208). However, mid-level managers are often overlooked in higher education, to the point they have been deemed “invisible leaders” (R. B. Young, 2007).

There has been little research conducted on mid-level managers in higher education and even scarcer is research on student affairs community college mid-level managers. Filan and Seagren (2003) indicated, “During the past thirty years, much of the research has concentrated specifically on the capacious role of mid-level leadership,

with the main focus on academic department chairs within colleges and universities” (p. 21). The need for further research on community college student affairs mid-level manager competencies and professional development is stressed throughout literature (Diaz, 2013; Frederick, 2014; R. B. Young, 2007); available research is largely dated to pre-2000s with limited publications since 1996. After conducting an extensive meta-analysis on past research of student affairs professionals, Herdlein, Riefler, and Mrowka (2013) stated,

Of significant and immediate importance is more focused and specific assessment of competencies important to student affairs practice in 2-year colleges, which serve nearly half of the college population. This oversight needs to be addressed as it is difficult to offer broad generalizations within the context of such a diverse set of academic institutions. (p. 266)

Identifying professional development preferences for community college mid-level managers is critical to the successful operation of an institution. A mid-level manager has increasingly complex responsibilities due to the evolving responsibilities placed on community colleges and the increasingly diverse student population served. “Middle managers are in the right place to judge the complexity of a situation, to understand the knowledge applied during each specific situation, adjust goals in real time, and integrate individual knowledge in norms and organizational procedures” (Janczak, 2004, p. 23). College leaders can no longer afford to ignore the needs of this employee group. An understanding what student affairs mid-level managers perceive as valuable professional development to be effective in their roles is important.

CURRENT STATUS OF THE PROBLEM

Community College Overview

Established upon the principle of the open-door, defined by Myran as “a philosophy founded on the faith that everyone can, through education, achieve their academic, career, and other life goals” (Myran, 2009, p. 2), community colleges play a fundamental role in the higher education system. In fact, 45%, almost half, the undergraduate population enrolled in higher education during Fall 2014 attended community colleges (American Association of Community Colleges [AACC], 2016). The mission of the community college is multi-faceted with expectations to provide vocational, developmental, and community education in addition to its primary collegiate function (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). Students are attracted to community colleges for accessibility; students can apply today and begin a class tomorrow. Most application processes are minimal, with no requirement to submit transcripts, ACT scores, essays, or reference letters (Rao, 2004). As a result of the open-door philosophy, community college students matriculate from a variety of backgrounds. Institutions serve a large percentage of minority, adult, first-generation, low-ability, and low-income students (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). During the Fall 2014 term, 51% of community college students were a minority ethnicity, 36% were first-generation, 17% were single parents, and 14% were over the age of 40 (AACC, 2016).

Furthermore, community college tuition rates are normally a fraction of the cost of a four-year institution. According to the College Board, students spend on average \$8,893 per year on tuition and fees at public institutions and \$30,094 per year at private

four-year institutions compared to \$3,264 per year for tuition and fees at a community college ("Average Published Undergraduate Charges," 2014). Low tuition rates attract a variety of students and are a primary influencer for students. In Fall 2014, 7.3 million students attended one of the 1,108 community colleges in the United States, which was 45% of all undergraduate students (AACC, 2016). Duree and Ebbers (2012) noted, "the U.S. community college system educates nearly half of all students enrolled in higher education and sustains a responsibility and commitment to educate the underserved" (p. 41).

Challenges Facing Community Colleges

Politicians, business leaders, and families across the nation are calling for education reform as a solution for economic disparity. The cost of higher education is increasing rapidly and the value of a degree, both associate and baccalaureate, is losing steam. Community colleges are at the forefront for revitalizing the United States economy by preparing students for the workforce through certificate and degree programs. President Barack Obama set the goal for the United States to be the number one producer, proportionally, of college degrees by the year 2020 (Obama, 2009). The Obama administration affirmed "community colleges are well suited to promote the dual goal of academic and on-the-job preparedness for the next generation of American workers" (n.p.).

The success of this completion agenda has fallen on the backs of community colleges, yet community colleges are facing one of the most tumultuous times in their history. Reports continuously reference issues such as the impending leadership crisis,

increased complexity of mission, declining funding, changing student demographics, and increased governmental regulations and stakeholder accountability, both in and out of the classroom (Bumphus & Neal, 2008; Duree & Ebbers, 2012; Robinson, Sugar, & Miller, 2010; Tschechtelin, 2011). Kay McClenney, Director of the Center for Community College Student Engagement (CCCSE, 2012), stated:

Community colleges currently are experiencing perhaps the highest expectations and the greatest challenges in their history. Facing fiscal constraint, enrollment pressures, and summons to support economic recovery, these institutions also are rising to a new clarion call: the “community college completion challenge.” Never has it been so clear that the futures of individuals, communities, and the nation rest significantly on the ability of community and technical colleges to ensure that far greater numbers of their students succeed in college, attain high-quality certificates and degrees, and transfer to baccalaureate institutions. (para. 1)

In effort to increase student success and graduation rates, lawmakers are adapting performance funding measures and requiring more accountability from community colleges to demonstrate student support and retention initiatives (Bailey, Jaggars, & Jenkins, 2015). Community colleges must transition from aiming to be as accessible as possible to instead focusing on both access and success.

Leadership Crisis

Community college leaders are leaving the field at an alarming rate due to an aging population of current presidents approaching retirement. In 2012, the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) surveyed 370 Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) with a 39% response rate. The study found that 75% of the CEOs surveyed plan to retire within the next 10 years and an additional 15% plan to retire within 11–15 years. Of the

75% planning to retire within the next 10 years, 43% indicated their retirement would likely occur by 2017 (Tekle, 2012). This alarming number of retirees poses a significant challenge for community colleges. As leadership transitions there are less qualified candidates for presidential positions than ever before. Furthermore, there is little preparation in place for training new college leadership and governing boards are frequently transitioning membership (AACC, 2012).

Duree and Ebbers (2012) stressed,

One of the biggest challenges facing community colleges in the new millennium is filling the leadership pipeline with individuals who possess the necessary skills and traits to be successful and are committed to upholding the community college core values and mission. (p. 41)

Achieving the Dream and the Aspen Institute (2013) identified five core qualities for effective college leadership: (1) a deep commitment to student access and success; (2) willingness to take significant risks to advance student success; (3) ability to create lasting change within the college; (4) having a strong, broad, strategic vision for the college and its students as reflected in external partnerships; and (5) raise and allocate resources in ways aligned to student success. Furthermore, leadership must be able to engage part-time faculty, accelerate reform, and harness uncertain technological innovation in today's evolving community college.

The Expanding Role of Student Affairs

Student affairs divisions are responsible for operations critical to student success and are primarily tasked with functions associated with encouraging holistic student development, building campus community, ensuring access and support for student

enrollment, and enhancing student engagement (Love, 2003; Taub & McEwen, 2006).

Professionals in student affairs are likely responsible for overseeing non-academic operations including academic advising, academic support, access and disability services, admissions, athletics, career services, counseling, financial aid, leadership development, multicultural, new student orientation, registration, service-learning, student conduct, student life, testing, and so forth (Love, 2003; Winston & Creamer, 1997). Student affairs professionals interact closely with students during their collegiate experience, guiding and supporting them on their educational journey. While colleges as a whole face an enormity of struggles, student affairs divisions are further challenged by issues such as federal financial aid program regulation changes, unsteady enrollments, sexual misconduct prevention, education mandates, supporting student veterans, amplified student mental health concerns, an increasingly diversifying student population, and ever-changing technology. Colleges nationwide are currently responding to national and state legislation requiring human and financial resources be committed to Title IX efforts (Weis, 2015); these undertakings are commonly within the realm of student affairs.

Student affairs work is becoming more important at the senior leadership level than ever before. College leadership is now heavily focused on subjects such as enrollment management, student success initiatives, crisis preparation — areas student affairs professionals have direct experience handling. Although the traditional pathway to a college presidency is via the academic division, student affairs professionals are

increasingly moving into this role due to the changing nature of the college presidency.

McGoey (2015) studied the pathways to presidency and determined

Today's college president needs to be adept in addressing issues related to student life that include, but are not limited to, student involvement in institutional governance, the impact of campus life on retention, and balancing the curricular needs of the faculty with the needs of student life. (p. 2)

Jacobson (2002) stated student affairs professionals “deal with the sort of intense controversies that land institutions in the headlines — racial tensions, student alcohol abuse, suicide, and rape, to name a few” (p. 1). This transition, along with Helfgot's (2005) findings in which 79% of college presidents responded the role of student affairs at an institution would increase within the next 5 to 10 years, confirms the value of student affairs work in higher education.

Mid-Level Manager Professional Development

The expanding role of student affairs work, coupled with pressing challenges facing the community college sector, demonstrates the need for prioritizing professional development for student affairs professionals. Student affairs mid-level managers play an instrumental role in developing and implementing college initiatives and therefore are the focus of this research. For the purposes of this study, a student affairs mid-level manager is defined as a professional who has departmental oversight and reports directly to a chief student affairs officer (Diaz, 2013). Mid-level managers have varying roles and levels of responsibility within a community college setting; the complexity of this employee classification will be discussed more thoroughly in the next chapter.

Mid-level managers must be adequately prepared to advance the mission of the community college. In response to budget constraints, mid-level professionals are likely to be given additional duties; others may pursue higher-level college positions to fill the leadership void. In many organizations, middle managers may be overlooked (Amey, VanDerLinden, & Brown, 2002) or under-appreciated (Rosser, 2000; Williams, 2000; R. B. Young, 2007). David Williams (2000) adequately stated middle managers can be an institution's "strongest resource for knowledge creation, breakthrough thinking, and change management — and they are readily available to you" (n.p.). Whether it be to stay effective in a mid-level role or to gain skills to be qualified for a chief student affairs officer position, professional development is critical for mid-level managers.

Shults (2001) suggested, "In order to gain the skills and traits important to effective leaders, those in the community college leadership pipeline must have access to appropriate professional development" (p. 4). *Reclaiming the American Dream*, a publication driven by the American Association of Community College's (AACCC) Commission for the Future of Community Colleges, was created in response to the new level of accountability required of community colleges to ensure student success (AACCC, 2012). *Reclaiming* further emphasizes the need to prioritize professional development amongst community college leaders.

NEED FOR FURTHER STUDY OF THE PROBLEM

Student affairs mid-level managers are accountable for carrying out objectives set forth by leadership while also managing staff directly responsible for service

implementation. With the expanding role of student affairs work in higher education, mid-level managers have an increased expectation to obtain the appropriate knowledge and skills to effectively handle these current issues. Kushibab (2007) stressed mid-level student affairs managers must possess skills including adequate oral and written communication skills, assessment and evaluation, budget and resource management, and supervisory skills. In addition to this skillset, mid-level managers should be able to integrate student development theory, adult learning theory, college student characteristics, retention best practices, and appropriate individual and group interventions into their daily work.

A method to gain the knowledge and skills necessary to advance the community college mission and effectively serve as a mid-level manager in student affairs is professional development. Chickering (1991) echoed this sentiment, stating,

The single most important ingredient for improving education in any institution is an organizational culture that values, nourishes, and provides support for efforts to become more effective professionals. This kind of culture emphasizes quality performance from administrators, faculty, support staff, and students. (p. 57)

Unfortunately, Tschechtelin (2011) added that a “frequent target for [budget] reductions is professional development, thereby sacrificing the education and training that colleges need to keep their programs and technology relevant for the future” (p. 52). In this volatile time, it is imperative student affairs mid-level managers have access to professional development that is valuable to their continued growth. This study will provide data to assist community college leaders in determining the professional development most valuable to mid-level managers.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was twofold: to identify the professional development preferences of student affairs mid-level managers and gain an understanding of why these activities were considered valuable. There were three research questions within this study.

Research Question 1: What types of professional development do community college student affairs mid-level managers value as important?

Research Question 2: What factors are associated with selection of professional development?

Research Question 3: What barriers are associated with selection of professional development?

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

There is little research on student affairs mid-level management, especially in regard to professional development. The majority of student affairs research focuses on the role of the chief student affairs officer. As the work of student affairs becomes increasingly complex, it is important mid-level managers are supported in their efforts to pursue professional development opportunities. In order to achieve the student success goals as set forth by national lawmakers, in addition to furthering the mission of the community college, community colleges must be adequately training employees to be effective in their positions.

Due to budget constraints, colleges may need to trim professional development budgets as a cost-saving measure. Mid-level managers must have a strong understanding of their goals for professional development and be able to articulate why participation is important for positional effectiveness. College leadership needs to understand the positive impact professional development has on mid-level managers, both personally and in their institutional role. Amey et al. (2002) concurred: “Developing a new generation of leaders at all administrative levels is imperative if community colleges are to be successful in an increasingly complex environment” (p. 574).

This study examines both internal and external professional development; internal refers to opportunities offered by the college and external refers to opportunities not coordinated by the college. Exploring the importance of both types of professional development will provide community college leadership and mid-level managers with valuable information as to how professional development goals can be met even during fiscal hardships. Furthermore, this study will add to the body of knowledge on student affairs mid-level managers, specifically in regard to the professional development needs of this population.

CONTRIBUTION TO PRACTICE

Diaz and Frederick both focused on Illinois community college student affairs mid-level managers for their dissertation work. Diaz (2013) studied Illinois chief student affairs officers and identified their perceptions of the professional development needs of mid-level managers. Frederick (2014) developed a state-wide leadership program

specifically geared towards student affairs mid-level managers using the research collected by Diaz. This study complements the work of Diaz and Frederick since mid-level managers are directly surveyed as to their professional development needs, selection factors, and barriers. Together, all three studies can be a great tool for community college leaders. Results of this study may shape future professional development offerings for Illinois community college student affairs mid-level managers.

APPROACH OF THE STUDY

Given a goal of this study was to compare results to Diaz's (2013) research on Illinois community college chief student affairs officers and their perceptions of the professional development needs of mid-level managers, the researcher mirrored the approach of Diaz's study. Using mixed methods, data were collected in a two-phase, non-experimental descriptive study research design. Participants completed a confidential Web-based survey and at the completion of the online survey, participants self-selected to volunteer for a face-to-face interview. The survey and interview questions were created using Diaz's study as the foundation.

Applying both quantitative and qualitative methodologies was the most appropriate design because it maximized the amount of data to be collected for greatest opportunity to answer the research questions richly. Mixed methods research "is more than simply collecting and analyzing both kinds of data; it also involves the use of both

approaches in tandem so that the overall strength of a study is greater than either qualitative or quantitative research” (Creswell, 2008, p. 4).

Illinois community college student affairs mid-level managers, as defined by this study, were the target population. Due to the varying organizational structures at each institution, it was not possible to identify the exact number of mid-level managers across the state. Based on input by chief student affairs officers, it was estimated there were approximately five professionals that fit the study definition of mid-level manager at each of the 48 community colleges in the state of Illinois, totaling an estimated 240 professionals. All mid-level managers who met the study criteria were eligible to participate in the study. The researcher emailed the survey link to the chief student affairs officer at every institution requesting the CSAO forward the survey to the appropriate individuals on their campus. In total, 48 mid-level managers completed the survey in its entirety and six professionals participated in a face-to-face interview.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Positionality

In qualitative research, the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis (Merriam, 2009; Seidman, 2013). Merriam (2009) pointed out human beings naturally have bias that may have an impact on the study and, therefore, it is important to disclose this subjectivity and how it may shape the collection and interpretation of the study. This can also be referred to as positionality.

In this study, the researcher is a student affairs mid-level manager at an Illinois community college. Through networking and professional associations, the researcher may have had interactions with participants in the study. To maintain neutrality to a reasonable extent, the researcher used her Ferris State University student email address to communicate with participants.

Parameters

A goal of the researcher was to use the results of this study, along with the findings of Diaz's (2013) and Frederick's (2014) work to shape future professional development offerings for Illinois community college student affairs mid-level managers. Therefore, this study only focused on professionals at Illinois community colleges. Although Illinois community colleges consist of 48 institutions with varying sizes, structures, demographics, and geography, it limits the generalizability of findings to mid-level managers across the nation.

Time Frame

The data collection of this study was conducted in Fall 2015.

VOCABULARY OF THE STUDY

Community college is defined as an accredited public, two-year institution of higher education in the United States that awards degrees and certificates, as well as providing community education and workforce training (AACC, 2010).

Mid-level manager is defined as a professional who has departmental oversight and reports directly to a chief student affairs officer (Diaz, 2013). This term is often used interchangeably with middle manager.

Professional development is defined as “involvement in activities that are intended to enhance professional effectiveness, and are chosen as a result of a decision-making process based on assessment of skills and designed goals while targeting skill development” (Schrieber, Dunkel, & Jahr, 1994, p. 26).

Student affairs is defined as the delivery of services enhancing educational experiences of college students (American Council on Education [ACE], 1937). The term *student affairs* is often used interchangeably with *student services* or *student development*.

Student success is defined as achieving a degree, certificate, or meeting an educational goal (AACC, 2010).

SUMMARY AND FORECAST

The purpose of the research, background of the problem, and high-level overview of how this study was conducted was shared in Chapter One. Following this introductory chapter is an extensive literature review presented in Chapter Two. The literature review consists of both current and foundational literature about student affairs work, mid-level managers, and professional development. Chapter Three explains the research design, providing an overview of both quantitative and qualitative methodologies and describing the research process for this study. The findings of the

study, which encompasses the results of the survey and the data gleaned from interviews are shared in Chapter Four. Lastly, Chapter Five discusses the study conclusions, implications for practice, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

There is little research evaluating the professional development preferences of student affairs mid-level managers and the majority of literature dates back to the 1990s with a few researchers publishing the bulk of articles on the topic. Studies have determined there is value in professional development for student affairs professionals yet there is little understanding as to what makes certain offerings more important to practitioners than others (Diaz, 2013; Moore, Martorana, & Twombly, 1985; VanDerLinden, 2005; Winston & Creamer, 1997). This study surveys community college student affairs mid-level managers to identify professional development preferences. Upon completion of the survey, multiple professionals were interviewed to better understand the value associated with the top ranked offerings, to gain more insight as to the factors associated with selecting professional development, and to detect the barriers impacting the ability to participate.

THE 21ST CENTURY COMMUNITY COLLEGE

The mission of the community college is multi-faceted and continually evolving. Throughout its short history, community colleges have grown from a mission to provide low-cost education to now serving as a beacon for community programs, adult

education, workforce credentials, and transfer preparation. While expanding the scope of the community college mission resulted in greater access to education, the need to focus on student retention and success became evident in 2009 when President Obama announced his vision for becoming the top producer of degrees in the world by 2020 (Obama, 2009).

In response, the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) launched the 21st century initiative to determine how community colleges can achieve this goal. The publication *Reclaiming the American Dream* (AACC, 2012) identifies a new strategy moving forward: redesign students' educational experiences, reinvent institutional roles, and reset the system to create incentives for student and institutional success. Community college reform is aimed not only to improve student success, but also to meet the challenges outlined in Chapter One. To this point, colleges must shift the organization culture

From a focus on student access to a focus on access and student success.

From fragmented course-taking to clear, coherent educational pathways.

From low rates of student success to high rates of student success.

From tolerance of achievement gaps to commitment to eradicating achievement gaps.

From a culture of anecdote to a culture of evidence.

From individual faculty prerogative to collective responsibility for student success.

From a culture of isolation to a culture of collaboration.

From emphasis on boutique programs to effective education at scale.

From a focus on teaching to a focus on learning.

From information infrastructure as management support to information infrastructure as learning analytics.

From funding tied to enrollment to funding tied to enrollment, institutional performance, and student success.

(AACC, 2012, p. ix)

Community colleges are committed to improving the lives of students through quality education. These institutions have a profound impact on higher education, as they are the primary educational providers to underrepresented and at-risk students (AACC, 2016). Article after article discussing current community college trends affirm challenges including serving an increasingly diverse student population, responding to increased accountability and transparency, and preparing for an influx in leadership transitions, all while receiving less government funding than ever before. Community colleges are at a pivotal time to re-shape the historic mission of access to best serve the needs of the 21st century student.

Community College Leadership Competencies

In 2013, the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) updated the necessary competencies for Emerging Leaders, New CEOs, and Experienced CEOs. The competencies are presented as a progression; each position must master the competency in its basic form, yet as the professional's career advances, the ability to master the more complex aspects of the competency is expected. The Emerging Leader must grasp:

- *Organizational Strategy*: Understand the overarching mission of community colleges, the specific culture within the institution, the organizational structure, and how the leader's role can successfully impact progression of

college goals through exceptional customer service and continuous improvement.

- *Institutional Finance, Research, Fundraising, and Resource Management:* Knowledge and compliance with the budget process, demonstrated time management and conflict resolution skills, commitment to institutional fundraising, and utilization of assessment techniques.
- *Communication:* Exhibit strong oral and written communication skills, refer to the appropriate channels of communication, model behaviors congruent to the institutional mission, become familiar with both local nuances and global issues.
- *Collaboration:* Build and foster campus and community relationships and identify key stakeholders to advance institutional success.
- *Community College Advocacy:* Gain familiarity with local, state, and national legislative issues and organization that impact community colleges.

(AACC, 2013, pp. 6-11)

Kushibab (2007) recognized community college mid-level managers require additional skills than a professional at a four-year institution due to the largely at-risk population served. At-risk encompasses those who are the first in their families to attend college, minorities, low socio-economic status, and/or academically under-prepared. Understanding and embracing the mission of the community college and having the ability to implement student development theory into practice are critical components for student affairs middle managers. Due to the unique mission of community colleges, professionals should also consider developing skills associated with workforce development, student retention, and community relations (Tyrell, 2014).

Fulton-Calkins and Milling (2005) support the philosophy that community college leaders require a different skillset than other higher education leaders. The multi-faceted mission, mounting turnover in leadership, and diverse student population are

cause for distinctive competencies. The researchers advocate community college leaders gain competency in nine leadership characteristics: (1) learning from the past but embracing the future, (2) enriching the inward journey, (3) having values, (4) having vision, (5) looking broadly for talent, (6) engaging in proactive succession planning, (7) involving faculty, (8) developing business and industry partnerships, and (9) keeping focus on preparing students for the future workforce (p. 235). Boggs (2003) pointed out that unlike leaders of four-year institutions, community college leaders are “continually challenged to defend their core values” (p. 16) due to the significant amount of critics of community colleges. Therefore, leaders must have a deep sense of commitment to the community college mission, along with the ability to articulate core values to various stakeholders.

As stated earlier, community colleges are facing tumultuous times with the push for more accountability, increasingly diverse student populations, an expanding mission, and decreasing financial resources. Nevarez and Wood (2012) claimed “for community college leaders to be successful in overcoming these challenges, they must be trained to confront the current problems facing their institutions while maintaining the forethought needed to understand the trajectory of current trends” (p. 311).

THE STUDENT AFFAIRS PROFESSION

The profession of student affairs is a relatively unknown career largely since students are not aware of the field when entering undergraduate studies, nor does any undergraduate major lead to the field (Richmond & Sherman, 1991). When researching

students in student affairs graduate programs, primary factors which influenced the decision to enter the profession included mentorship and encouragement from a student affairs professional (Hunter, 1992; Richmond & Sherman, 1991; Taub & McEwen, 2006; Williams, McEwen, & Engstrom, 1990), undergraduate student employment in a student affairs area (Hunter, 1992; Richmond & Sherman, 1991), and a desire to improve campus life (Hunter, 1992; Taub & McEwen, 2006).

Student affairs focuses on all aspects of the student's life outside the classroom and is often the term used to refer to the administrative unit of the college where all services relating to the student experience are contained (Helfgot, 2005). Love (2003) defined student affairs as "any advising, counseling, management, or administrative function at a college or university that exists outside the classroom . . . which help to meet the learning and developmental needs of all students and humanizing the college campus" (n.p.). Student affairs divisions generally consist of academic advising, academic support, access and disability services, admissions, athletics, career services, counseling, financial aid, leadership development, multicultural, new student orientation, registration, service-learning, student conduct, student life, testing, and so forth (Love, 2003; Winston & Creamer, 1997). These departments are tasked with intentionally providing programs and services that increase student development and success.

Professionals in student affairs interact with college students to aid them in their growth and development. According to Whitt (1999), "Student affairs educators to play varied roles in the lives of students: teacher, coach, guide, mentor, advisor, role model,

and caring professional” (p. 85). Contributing to student learning is a fundamental aspect of student affairs work (Dungy, 2009). King (2003) echoed, “Student affairs practitioners not only enhance student learning directly but often indirectly by serving as a resource to faculty, campus administrators, and parents” (p. 234). Whether an entry-level, mid-level, or senior professional, Helfgot (2005) identified the following core values necessary for community college student affairs professionals: a commitment to the whole student; recognition and appreciation of individual differences; a commitment to facilitating student development, success, and learning; providing quality services to meet student needs; a belief in the power and richness of the out-of-class environment; and a commitment to providing access and opportunity.

Student Affairs Competencies

Professional organizations advocate for college leadership to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to advance the institutional mission and support student learning. Professional organizations, ACPA and NASPA joined together in 2010 and again in 2015 to establish competencies essential for student affairs professionals. This joint report identified skills and abilities necessary on a foundational, intermediate, and advanced level. The 2015 updated competencies areas include:

- *Advising and Supporting*: Support students through advising, counseling, critiquing, and guiding regardless of professional role within the field.
- *Assessment, Evaluation, and Research (AER)*: Integrate AER into practices and processes and adapt areas based on data.
- *History, Philosophy, and Values*: Understand the founding principles of the professional practice and weave this framework into current practice.

- *Human and Organizational Resources:* Demonstrate appropriate supervision skills and proper application of institutional processes.
- *Law, Policy, and Governance:* Comprehend the various legal constructs and governmental structures and their impact on the profession.
- *Leadership:* Exhibit the skills and abilities to inspire and influence others to effect change within the institution.
- *Personal and Ethical Foundations:* Integrate ethics into all aspects of both self and professional practices and processes. Maintain personal wellness, develop a sense of awareness, cultivate passion for work, and uphold excellent and integrity in the work environment.
- *Social Justice and Inclusion:* Create learning environments rich with varying backgrounds, and educate and celebrate the uniqueness of individuals.
- *Student Learning and Development:* Apply theory to inform practice and train others on the value of incorporating theory into student affairs practice.
- *Technology:* Attain skills and knowledge that embrace the digital literacy generation.

These competencies showcase the nature of student affairs work. According to Lovell and Kosten's (2000) meta-analysis on the characteristics of student affairs professionals, the following competencies were identified in over 40% of the research studies: administration and management; human facilitation; research, evaluation, and assessment; communication; and leadership. Practitioners need to complete self-assessments on these competencies and create professional development plans to build upon their weak areas. Ascertaining these competencies can be accomplished through intentional, effective professional development.

MID-LEVEL MANAGERS

A review of the literature identified multiple definitions for classifying middle managers in higher education. Researchers agree it is very difficult to define a student affairs mid-level manager due to the varying roles and responsibilities these can encompass. Common definitions included a practitioner with a certain number years of experience, budget/personnel management (Belch & Strange, 1995; J. E. Scott, 2000), programmatic or departmental responsibility (Diaz, 2013; Roberts, 2007; R. B. Young, 2007), and may report directly to the chief student services officer (Belch & Strange, 1995; Diaz, 2013; Roberts, 2007). Mills (2000) added these employees “manage people, money, information, and programs” (p. 136). Depending on the definition used by the author of the study, middle managers may have titles like coordinator, director, manager, associate dean, or dean (Chernow, Cooper, & Winston, 2003; Diaz, 2013; Rosser, 2000).

Mid-level managers are the natural conduit between senior leadership and entry level positions. Middle managers face the difficulty of engaging entry-level professionals and responding to the concerns of senior-level executives (W.W. Young, Jr., 2007). Taylor (2007) suggested mid-level managers are responsible for translating strategy from senior leadership into actions and results. She further claimed “mid-level managers serve both sides of multiple roles: supervisor and supervisee; influencer and influenced; visionary and implementer; mentor and mentee” (p. 135). Mills (2000) pointed out managers tend to work most closely with staff, whereas the entry level professionals they supervise work directly with students.

The values and perceptions of student affairs mid-level managers vary greatly since the definition of the employee classification is vast. Although common characteristics can be noted, there are multiple contradicting studies on the viewpoints of student affairs mid-level managers. In the Belch and Strange (1995) study of student affairs mid-level managers, participants referred to the challenge of duality within their role. This duality included the practice of having to balance between those they supervise and their supervisors, as well as managing a great amount of responsibility while not necessarily having the authority to set the direction for the initiative.

To this point, some research suggests mid-level managers are responsible for implementing critical programs and services yet have little to no ability to affect the policies in which the programs stem (Belch & Strange, 1995; Mills, 2000; Williams, 2000). However, White, Webb, and Young (1990) learned from student affairs mid-level managers that 88% of respondents felt they did influence division policy and 42% felt they influenced institution policy. These conflicting study results confirm the role of the mid-level manager is too broad to accurately identify the needs and interests of these employees.

Literature repeatedly claims middle managers may be overlooked (Amey et al., 2002; R. A. Scott, 1980) or under-appreciated (Rosser, 2000; Williams, 2000; R. B. Young, 2007) within higher education. Johnsrud (1996) determined middle managers are frustrated by the sheer mid-manager nature of the position, lack of recognition for their competence and contribution, and limited career advancement. Researchers have studied job satisfaction of middle managers and although the perception that student

affairs middle managers feel disrespected and ignored, the research doesn't support this assumption (Rosser & Javinar, 2003; R. B. Young, 2007). Rosser and Javinar (2003) studied student affairs mid-level managers and learned (a) their professional development activities are supported, (b) they are provided opportunities for career development, (c) they believe hiring practices are fair, (d) there is opportunity for promotion, (e) evaluations are based on clear performance criteria, and (f) the workload within their unit is evenly distributed (p. 823).

Therefore, claims that student affairs middle management feel undervalued are not supported by research. The dates in which these studies were conducted could lead one to believe there has been improvement regarding the treatment of middle managers in higher education since the 1990s. However, the continued lack of attention paid to middle managers in higher education is evidenced by the disproportionately low amount of research on this subject in comparison to entry-level and senior-level positions, especially within the last 20 years.

Competencies of the Middle Manager

Multiple studies identify competencies for student affairs mid-level managers. To determine these competencies, researchers directly asked mid-level managers to recognize skills necessary for positional success and researchers asked chief student affairs officers to distinguish the skills they deem necessary for a mid-level position. Using either methodology, leadership skills ranked as the primary competency in

student affairs mid-level management is common throughout literature (Fey & Carpenter, 1996; Gordon, Strode, & Mann, 1993; Sermersheim & Keim, 2005).

When surveying mid-level professionals directly leadership, fiscal management, personnel management, communication, professional development, and student contact were deemed as important skills to possess (Fey & Carpenter, 1996; Kane, 1982; Sermersheim & Keim, 2005). Sermersheim and Keim's (2005) participants ranked research and evaluation as the lowest in terms of skill importance yet also the skill most needing improvement. Dating back years prior, in both Fey and Carpenter's (1996) and Kane's (1982) studies, mid-level managers also ranked research and evaluation as the least important of middle management competencies. This historical lack of value for research and evaluation is not surprising since community college leaders are now being criticized for the lack of data-driven decision-making. Sermersheim and Keim's results that research and evaluation needs the most improvement may foreshadow the culture shift embracing assessment. Furthermore, it was noted in order to work collaboratively with faculty, the middle manager must be willing to review research, understand its importance, and find opportunities to apply research findings to job functions (Sermersheim & Keim, 2005).

Studies in which chief student affairs officers were asked to identify mid-level management competencies, similar results prevailed. In 1993, chief student affairs officers (CSAOs) ranked leadership, student contact, communication, personnel, and fiscal management as highest of importance for mid-level administrators (Gordon et al., 1993). Six years later, the Saunders and Cooper (1999) study echoed these results and

also identified conflict resolution, effectively creating and participating in teams, implementing effective decisions, and understanding organizational behavior. In 2013, Diaz studied Illinois community college CSAOs regarding the critical competencies of middle managers and the five most selected items were basic human relations skills, technical knowledge of functional area, supervisory skills, specific knowledge about college student development, and conflict resolution skills.

Mather, Bryan, and Faulkner (2009) evaluated the research published on student affairs mid-level management and determined the top priorities were addressing transitions, managing ambiguity, fostering leadership, and technical skills. W. W. Young, Jr. (2007) identified three competencies for student affairs middle managers: the ability to describe challenges within a unit for proper reallocation of resources to enhance student learning and development, the ability to model communication and collaboration, and the ability to demonstrate the academic mission of the institution. In addition, J. E. Scott (2000) suggested student affairs mid-level managers master conflict resolution and mediation skills, mentoring, advising student groups, technology management, understanding the big picture, networking, and skills in chairing committees, writing reports, and problem solving. Lastly, to advance student learning, a middle manager must have skills in selecting, motivating, delegating, and reviewing staff (Mills, 2000).

STUDENT AFFAIRS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Professional development is a standard of practice in most, if not all, career industries (Laden, 1996; Schwartz & Bryan, 1998; J. E. Scott, 2000). Schreiber et al. (1994) define professional development as “involvement in activities that are intended to enhance professional effectiveness, and are chosen as a result of a decision-making process based on assessment of skills and designed goals while targeting skill development” (p. 26). Dalton (1988) describes professional development in higher education as “the intentional and systematic effort to enhance the knowledge and skills of staff members” (p. 535). A simplistic concept of professional development is Tinsley’s (1984) description of an “activity leading to increased knowledge and competence in one’s present position or to enhanced qualifications for a more responsible position” (p. 18).

Attaining the competencies identified in earlier sections can be achieved through participation in effective, meaningful professional development. Winston and Creamer (1997) stressed for student affairs professionals, “Continuous learning goes to the heart of professional practice. Continuous professional education is an irrefutable ethical responsibility of practicing professionals” (p. 362). J. E. Scott (2000) stated, “The dynamic nature of student affairs work supports the need for staff to be engaged in continuous professional growth opportunities in order to effectively serve students and their institutions” (p. 478).

Kruger (2000) supported this notion, as “the very practice and philosophy of student affairs implies on-going, lifelong professional development” (p. 536). Cox and

Ivy (1984) echoed these sentiments, claiming student affairs professionals engaging in professional development programs enhance their ability to work with students, create change, and prosper in the management environment. Participating in professional development activities provides student affairs staff the opportunity to learn more about the profession and the climate of higher education, as well as gain skills that will improve their ability to do their job.

Student affairs practitioners encourage students to explore interests, participate in activities to gain transferable skills, and take advantage of opportunities for networking and professional growth. As advocates for student development, it is imperative student affairs practitioners implore that same strategy when planning for their own professional development. Moreover, higher education is in constant change with continuous technology updates, additional federal and state laws and mandates, and an evolving student demographic. Professionals must be equipped to work collaboratively across disciplines, adapt to the new complexities within higher education, and support our diverse student populations for their student success. Professional development of student affairs staff benefit students, improves individual staff, and improves the organization (Dalton, 1988).

Learning Reconsidered, a joint publication of NASPA and ACPA (2004), strongly encourages institutions to prioritize professional development for student affairs professionals to stay current in the field and to gain multicultural sensitivity as college populations become increasingly diverse. Further, the article stresses, “Student affairs divisions have a responsibility to support such staff development financially and through

assigning high priority to staff development initiatives, and by rewarding staff who stay current in the field” (p. 29).

Due to the expanding scope of national and state regulations impacting student affairs, institutions are relying on professional development activities to educate staff as a means for compliance. Continuous unfunded mandates arise with the expectation institutions act in accordance or a penalty ensues. For example, colleges are now required by national legislation to have employee(s) trained as Title IX investigators, but a standard training does not accompany the law. Therefore, business organizations create Title IX investigator certifications and market these to institutions as professional development for employees. Throughout student affairs this similar situation is occurring frequently; professional development enables practitioners to become competent in content areas that are ever-changing due to statutes and laws. Critical issues such as accessibility/disability law, campus violence, crisis management, discrimination suits, financial aid regulations, sexual assault, and transgender rights are frequent topics examined through professional development.

Professional development is transitioning from a discretionary opportunity meant to expand a skillset to an essential component of a college position. Student affairs divisions are especially reliant on professional development to meet regulatory obligations as well as to learn how to serve students effectively in light of current trends. Although budget resources are scarce, college leadership must understand the growing importance practitioners place on professional development as a mechanism to stay compliant in their roles.

Professional Development Activities

An extensive literature review reveals professional development delivery can come in many shapes and sizes. Generally, student affairs staff value professional development (Fey & Carpenter, 1996; Janosik, Carpenter, & Creamer, 2006; Kane, 1982; Roberts, 2007), but the challenge lies within developing an intentional, systematic curriculum to meeting the varying needs of practitioners (Carpenter, 2003; Tyrell, 2014; Winston & Creamer, 2007). A consensus is that the student affairs professional makes a personal commitment to creating an intentional professional development plan (Carpenter, 2003; Tyrell, 2014) to master pre-determined skills and competencies.

A number of studies have researched the value of professional development programs offered to student affairs professionals. In a comprehensive study of student affairs practitioners, J. E. Scott (2000) identified the following program delivery methods for staff development at all levels as preferred: topic-specific workshops, teleconferences, discussion groups, training videos, administrative sabbaticals, self-directed programs, administrative internships, administrative shadowing, administrative exchange programs, site visits to other institutions, and orientation for new staff. He added that mid-level managers should contribute to professional organizations, develop short- and long-term career goals, enroll in graduate-level courses, and keep current with professional readings and literature.

Roberts (2007) surveyed 331 mid-level managers involved in NASPA Region III and learned discussions with colleagues, mentors, and professional conferences as the most effective professional development methods to gain competencies. Years earlier,

Kane (1982) studied student affairs mid-level managers and received similar findings determining the top five professional development activities were attending conferences, reading, student involvement, discussions with colleagues, and workshops. Fey and Carpenter (1996) studied 177 student affairs mid-level managers in Texas and reported conferences, workshops, and reading ranked significantly higher in preference for professional development than colleague discussions, mentors, staff meetings, and sabbaticals. Kruger (2000) suggested going one step further by presenting at conferences, participating in service learning and internships, and writing to advance the literature in the field.

Although study results can differ slightly, these studies in which mid-level managers are the subjects confirm student affairs professionals' value interacting with colleagues and learning from one another, as demonstrated by the continued support of interpersonal-focused professional development programs. This is not surprising since the field of student affairs emphasizes personal interactions and collaboration. DeCoster and Brown (1991) suggested six categories to incorporate into a student affairs staff development curriculum:

1. Facilitating interaction with colleagues and associates;
2. Developing functional skills and competencies;
3. Promoting self-understanding and self-actualization;
4. Exposure to innovative programs;
5. Providing opportunities for professional renewal; and
6. Conveying theoretical and philosophical knowledge. (p. 568)

Learning Reconsidered (NASPA & ACPA, 2004) recommends, “Each institution should provide ongoing professional development programs that address the changing nature of the student experience and student learning so that all campus educators can continuously assess and improve their efforts in enhancing the learning process” (p. 34). For the purposes of this study, internal and external offerings were evaluated by student affairs mid-level managers. Professional development coordinated by the employee’s institution is referred to in this study as “internal” offerings. These activities include:

- Completed formal, written performance review for others;
- Provided purposeful career counseling (or, career review to plan ways to acquire additional skills, education, and training) for others;
- Participated in in-service staff development programs or courses;
- Provided in-service staff development programs for others;
- Taken on a temporary task or job rotation;
- Received formal mentoring/coaching from senior staff member;
- Received informal mentoring/coaching from senior staff member;
- Provided formal mentoring/coaching for others;
- Provided informal mentoring/coaching for others;
- Participated in special institutional task forces, committees, and/or commissions;
- Taken on additional responsibilities above and beyond specific job description;
- Applied for a sabbatical or study leave.

Multiple researchers studied the value of internal professional development during the last 30 years (Diaz, 2013; Moore et al., 1985; VanDerLinden, 2005; Winston &

Creamer, 1997) and determined these activities were important to the growth of mid-level student affairs managers. Internal professional development tends to be cost-effective, easy to implement offerings which expand the skillset of staff members without burdening institutional resources. Although internal offerings are deemed important, there is little understanding as to why these are valuable for mid-level managers.

Professional development not coordinated by the institution, but may be supported by the institution, is referred to as “external.” These activities include:

- Read a professional journal article directly related to student affairs;
- Read a book directly related to student affairs;
- Completed formal education related to field (e.g., coursework);
- Attended an in-person specialized workshop or seminar;
- Attended an online specialized workshop or seminar (e.g., webinar);
- Attended a professional association convention;
- Made a presentation at conference;
- Attended a higher education management institute;
- Participated in a national fellowship or leadership program;
- Performed independent research on a topic;
- Authored/coauthored a manuscript for publication;
- Performed as an external consultant;
- Served on board of directors for a state or regional organization;
- Served on board of directors for a national organization leave.

Again, multiple studies confirm the value of external professional development to student affairs mid-level managers (Diaz, 2013; Moore et al., 1985; VanDerLinden, 2005; Winston & Creamer, 1997). External offerings may require more resources, both personally and institutionally, such as time away from work or family and financial obligations. Similar to internal offerings, the value of external professional development has been confirmed yet there is little information as to why mid-level managers deem it effective.

THE ROLE OF PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS IN PROVIDING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Within higher education, there are hundreds of professional associations and organizations dedicated to serving the needs of their membership (Laden, 1996; Schwartz & Bryan, 1998). These associations can be at the local, state, regional, national, and international level. The field of student affairs is comprised with dozens of task-specific areas, all which have a national organization serving as the beacon for centralizing best practices, information sharing, promoting professional development, and building competencies (Schwartz & Bryan, 1998). Furthermore, aspiring leaders look to professional associations to highlight the various aspects of educational leadership, build networking and mentoring opportunities, and to provide a foundation for both the academic and technical skills of leadership (Laden, 1996). Chernow et al. (2003) found involvement in associations lessened with increased years of experience, which they claimed was likely due to the demands of their job responsibilities.

Community college student affairs professionals have multiple national associations to utilize within the field of higher education. These organizations provide various avenues for professional development, including leadership programs, trainings, conferences, and communication list-serves. The American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) is the national organization committed to advancing and supporting community colleges (“About AACC,” n.d.). Founded in 1920, AACC serves nearly 1,200 two-year, associate-degree granting institutions. AACC is not only a resource for institutions, but also represents the community college voice in legislative issues.

There are two prominent organizations that represent the student affairs profession: the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) and the American College Personnel Association (ACPA). The challenge these organizations face is serving the diverse needs of their members, which consist of community colleges, four-year institutions, public, and private organizations — all with budgets across the spectrum. Community college student affairs professionals can easily be ignored within these associations because their issues cannot normally be blended with the other institutions (Student Affairs Community College Association [SACCA], 2014). To respond to these concerns, Student Affairs Community College Association (SACCA) was launched in January 2015 (“Announcing the Launch,” 2015) as the first student affairs national association specifically for community college employees.

Professional associations are also active at the state-wide level. In the state of Illinois, position-specific associations have emerged and function as an avenue for professional development and networking. According to the Illinois Council of

Community College Administrators (“Commissions,” n.d.), active professional associations affiliated with the ICCCA include the Admissions and Records Officers (ICCAROO), Arts and Science Transfer and Developmental Education Administrators (ASTDEA), Career Commission, Career Services Professionals (IC3SP), Chief Academic Officers Commission (CAO or ICCCAO), Chief Student Services Officers (ICCCSSO or CSSO), Continuing Education and Training (ICCET), Illinois Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (ILASFAA), Information Technology Commission (ICCCA-TC), Learning Resources Commission, Student Activities (ICCSAA), and Training Resource and Information Network (weTRaIN).

Involvement in professional associations is an excellent opportunity for mid-level managers to gain competencies, as well as build professional networks. Career advancement is also perceived as an indirect benefit of participating in professional associations (Belch & Strange, 1995; Rosser, 2004; Saunders & Cooper, 1999).

Mid-Level Manager Professional Development Offerings

To respond to the unique needs of student affairs mid-level managers, multiple associations have created professional development opportunities for this target audience. The two premier student affairs professional associations, NASPA and ACPA, both offer a professional development conference for mid-level managers. NASPA’s Mid-Level Administrators Conference focuses on connecting participants with other mid-level colleagues who experience similar issues, as well as senior professionals who can provide mentorship and guidance. This conference is meant to provide participants

the opportunity to further develop their professional competencies by acquiring new skills and reflecting on their strengths and areas of improvement (NASPA Mid-Level Administrators Conference, n.d.).

ACPA hosts the Donna M. Bourassa Mid-Level Management Institute. This institute has a strong emphasis on leadership development and current complexities facing the student affairs profession. Other features include skill development in areas including supervision, politics, communication, multicultural competencies, organizational culture, ethics, and transition management (2015 Donna M. Bourassa Mid-Level Management Institute, 2015).

The Southern Association for College Student Affairs (SACSA) also promotes a Mid-Managers Institute for their membership. Beyond skill development, this conference aims to provide an experience where participants gain self-understanding and strengthen their values so they are able to positively impact the profession (SACSA, n.d.). Topics include campus politics, managing from the middle, strategic planning, collaborating between academic and student affairs, and career planning. NASPA, ACPA, and SACSA each recommend participants have at least five years of student affairs experience, supervise full-time staff members, and oversee multiple student affairs functions.

The challenge these associations face when coordinating professional development activities is the vast array of needs of student affair mid-level managers. As shared earlier, student affairs is a broad field that encompasses dozens of unique job

functions. Furthermore, the definition of a mid-level manager is expansive and includes multiple professionals at varying levels of their career.

SUMMARY

The role and function of community colleges, student affairs professionals, and mid-level managers have all expanded greatly in recent years. Student affairs mid-level managers in community colleges play a vital role in carrying out college initiatives and contributing to student learning. Unfortunately, literature regarding professional development for student affairs mid-level managers is largely outdated and lacks rationale for what makes offerings more valuable than others. Furthermore, research specifically studying the needs of community college professionals in any capacity is few and far between. This chapter summarized the role of community colleges in the overall context of higher education and shared competencies expected of community college leadership. A thorough explanation of the student affairs profession and competencies for practitioners was reviewed with particular attention to the challenges of mid-level managers and the specific skills and abilities necessary for that role. Lastly, the researcher shared literature as to the value of professional development, the types of activities considered professional development, and the role of professional associations in professional development. Chapter Three describes the research design employed to conduct the study.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH RATIONALE

Research Purpose

The purpose of this study was to identify the professional development preferences of student affairs mid-level managers in community colleges. Previous research is outdated and lacks the description as to why mid-level managers deem activities as important. Selection factors and barriers of professional development were also explored. A recent study (Diaz, 2013) ascertained the competencies and professional development needs of Illinois community college student affairs mid-level managers, as perceived by chief student affairs officers. This study will examine if mid-level managers and chief student affairs officers share viewpoints as to the role of professional development for this employee classification.

Research Questions

Research Question 1: What types of professional development do community college student affairs mid-level managers value as important?

Research Question 2: What factors are associated with selection of professional development?

Research Question 3: What barriers are associated with selection of professional development?

Research Approach

To address the research questions, a two-phase, sequential mixed methods design (Thomas, 2003) was determined to be the best approach for this study. The first phase was a quantitative survey distributed electronically to participants, comprised largely of Likert-type questions. The second phase of the study utilized a qualitative approach. A confidential face-to-face interview was conducted with participants who completed the online survey and voluntarily agreed to participate. The interviews were an opportunity to explore the findings of the quantitative survey in detail through a one-on-one dialogue.

Appropriateness of the Methodology to the Research

A mixed methods research approach was the most appropriate research design because it maximized the amount of data collected and analyzed. It was determined to employ these methods sequentially because the findings from the quantitative survey informed the nature of the qualitative interview (Creswell, 2008). Data gathered from the quantitative portion of the research design guided the project, while the qualitative data functioned in a supportive role. The quantitative survey allowed for a large amount of participants, which, in turn, produced a great deal of data to run a multitude of reports and allowed for more generalizations in the implications of the data. Data were then explored in greater detail during the interview, leading the researcher to formulate

rationale behind the responses. While both quantitative and qualitative methods are strong on their own, using the methods together generated a broad perspective of many, as well as a more detailed viewpoint by few. The researcher anticipated the combination of information drawn from multiple forms of data would lead to an expanded understanding of the professional development preferences of student affairs mid-level managers in community colleges.

RESEARCH PLAN

Selection and Description of Sample

Student affairs mid-level managers at Illinois community colleges were the sample population for this study. For the purposes of this study, a mid-level manager was defined as a student affairs professional who has programmatic or departmental responsibility and reports directly to the chief student affairs officer (Diaz, 2013). As demonstrated through the literature review in Chapter Two, the inherent challenge with studying this population was the lack of consistency in determining middle management. There was not a directory of these positions and the organizational charts of each college varied too greatly to allow for a list of participants to be identified. At the time of the study, there were 48 community colleges in the state of Illinois and in alignment with purposeful, nonprobability sampling (Vogt, 2007) all colleges were invited to participate in the study. Sampling is described as selecting and studying a small group from larger group to learn more about the larger group. Vogt (2007) suggested non-probability purposive sampling when the “researcher seeks to identify

members of an unusual group” (p. 82). Using this technique limits the amount of generalizability, but is an excellent method to draw conclusions specific to the population of the study. Fifty-six participants started the survey, but only 48 surveys were completed entirely. Only the 48 completed surveys were used when analyzing data. Six professionals volunteered for phase two and all were interviewed for the study.

Communication with Sample

Since the study definition of a mid-level manager required the employee directly reported to the chief student affairs officer, members of the Illinois Community College Chief Student Services Officers (ICCCSSO) organization were utilized to disseminate the survey to potential participants. ICCCSSO is a professional association endorsed by the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) which has an email list-serve reaching the membership from each of the community colleges statewide. An email invitation, with survey link embedded, was sent to the ICCCSSO email list serve with the request to forward the invitation to mid-level managers who met the study definition. Two reminder emails were sent to the ICCCSSO list serve with additional requests to forward the survey to appropriate personnel. Throughout the duration the survey was available, the researcher also emailed Illinois chief student services officers individually to request their support in forwarding the survey invitation to their direct reports.

Upon completing the final question of the survey, participants were provided information regarding phase two of the study, the qualitative interviews. If they so

desired, participants could be directed to a separate webpage to enter their contact and demographic information to learn more about this part of the study. Those who completed this questionnaire were then emailed directly from the researcher with more information on the interviews, to confirm participation, and to schedule interviews.

DATA COLLECTION

Nature of Survey Research

Surveys are a very popular research method largely due to their ability to collect an abundance of data in a reasonable amount of time (Vogt, 2007). A survey is an excellent way to obtain subjective data from participants, such as what their attitudes and beliefs are on a topic. Vogt (2007) identified four important criteria when determining whether it is appropriate to use a survey design. First, a survey is useful when it is best to get information directly from the individuals. Secondly, if the researcher has good reason to believe a reasonable response rate is likely a survey is a useful technique. Third, a survey is a good choice in collecting data when the respondents are expected to give reliable information. Lastly, the researcher must be clear on how the survey answers will be handled.

Appropriateness of the Technique

Since this research aimed to identify preferences of mid-level managers across the state of Illinois, it was important to collect data from as many participants as possible, which was why a survey was appropriate. The researcher aimed to get a large participant number to be able to obtain results from the study that were generalizable

to this unique population of student affairs mid-level managers in Illinois community colleges. Using an online survey to collect data streamlined the data collection approach and increased the potential to collect a large amount of information with minimal effort from the researcher. To expand upon this notion, interviewing all of the participants would have been logistically unreasonable, but disseminating an online survey that reached the participants instantly was much more feasible.

Furthermore, this research fit the criteria identified by Vogt (2007) as to when it is best to use a survey. The researcher wanted to collect subjective information from participants about their professional development preferences, a reasonable response rate was expected due to the perceived value of the study to participants, the data collected were not of a sensitive nature so the researcher believed participants answered honestly, and a plan was in place for data analysis.

Nature of Interview Research

The second phase of this study was a qualitative one-on-one interview with a smaller number of participants who completed the initial survey in phase one.

Qualitative researchers are “interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (Merriam, 2009, p. 5). Merriam (2009) identified four characteristics key to qualitative research, the first being to focus on meaning and understanding. Secondly, unlike in quantitative research where there is a tool used such as a survey, in a qualitative study the researcher and their chosen questions are the primary instrument

for data collection and analysis. Third, the process is inductive, meaning the researcher builds a theory based on the information gathered. Lastly, the product is richly descriptive to the reader.

This study used a phenomenological approach, defined as a “study of people’s conscious experience of their life-world” (Merriam, 2009, p. 25). Interviews are a common way to conduct qualitative research. DeMarrais (2004) described interviewing as “a process in which a researcher and participant engage in a conversation focused on questions related to a research study” (p. 55). There are three types of interview formats: highly structured, semi-structured, and unstructured (Merriam, 2009). The researcher utilized the semi-structured approach, which allowed for flexibility based on the conversation between the researcher and the participant.

Appropriateness of the Technique

The second phase of this research involved interviewing six participants who completed the online survey. The initial survey results provided a broad perspective from participants statewide and the interviews were designed to obtain insight about the meaning and interpretation of the survey results. Semi-structured interviewing was an appropriate technique for the second phase of the study because it allowed for the researcher to respond to the participant and adapt to emerging themes. There were six interviews conducted and the researcher was able to alter questions and adjust probes as the interviews progressed to test formulating hypotheses. Since the researcher intended to understand the beliefs and values associated with professional

development, using a phenomenological approach through interviewing best met the needs of the study.

Development of Reliable/Valid/Trustworthy Materials/Instrument(s)

Validity and Reliability

Validity, in regard to the instrument, generally speaks to the relevancy of the measurement and the accuracy of the research (Vogt, 2007). Content validity “gauges the degree to which the content of a test or survey matches the content it is intended to measure” (Vogt, 2007, p. 118). Reliability refers to the consistency of the instrument and the ease of replication. The integrity of the instrument’s validity and reliability was affirmed. Because this study aimed to further previous research conducted on the professional development of student affairs mid-level managers, the instruments for both the quantitative and qualitative aspects were replicated with permission from the Diaz (2013) study. Diaz’s framework was rooted in the research shared in the literature review regarding mid-level manager professional development. Specifically, the instruments used in the earlier studies of Moore et al. (1985), VanDerLinden (2005), and Winston and Creamer (1997) were blended to address the purpose of Diaz’s study, which, in turn, was then used for this study. The instrument was slightly modified to better suit the needs of this study. In the Diaz study, aspects such as mid-level manager competencies and adult learning theory were explored. Parts of the instruments related to those research questions were removed from the instruments. The most substantial change was altering the survey from a 3-choice Likert scale to a 5-choice Likert scale.

A pilot study was also conducted to test validity and reliability. Twelve professionals from Arizona, Illinois, and Michigan reviewed the instruments and provided feedback to the researcher. This gave the researcher an opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness of the instruments by reviewing the data collected to determine if the research questions were addressed wholly. The instruments are included in Appendices C and D.

Procedure

This study consisted of two phases: a survey followed by a one-on-one interview. Specific dates in which each phase of the study was conducted are included in the section titled "Timeline." The survey was administered in the form electronically via SurveyMonkey to members of the Illinois Community College Chief Student Services Officers (ICCCSSO) email list serve. The email invitation directed the list serve members to forward the survey to personnel at their institutions who met the eligibility criteria. An invitation to participate, an explanation of the purpose of the study, and a direct link to the survey were included in the body of the message. When participants selected the link and entered the survey, the first page explained the risks and voluntary nature of the study. By continuing with the survey, the participants provided their consent to take part in the study. If they did not provide consent, the rest of the survey was inaccessible.

The survey was originally available for close to three weeks and was extended one week to capture more responses. A reminder email was sent to the list serve two weeks after the initial invitation and individual emails were sent to members of the ICCCSSO organization encouraging their prompt action in forwarding the survey to

appropriate personnel. The researcher was not able to communicate with mid-level managers directly to invite them into the study due to Institutional Review Board (IRB) directives.

When participants completed the online survey, a message appeared to explain the first phase of the study was complete and shared information about phase two of the study, which was a 90-minute interview on the same topic. If participants were interested in participating in learning more about phase two of the study they would be directed to a different webpage outside of the survey through a new web link. This webpage then outlined details of phase two of the study. Those interested in participating in phase two of the study completed a short demographic questionnaire and provided their contact information for the researcher. Within six weeks of the survey closure, all six professionals who showed interest in phase two of the study were contacted through email to schedule interviews. The email included a copy of the Informed Consent Agreement and further description as to the nature of the interview. Six interviews were scheduled based on availability of the participants over the course of two weeks, each held at the college where the participant was employed. Interviews were recorded by the researcher with permission by the participants and transcribed using the services of a professional transcription service. A copy of the interview transcription was sent to the participant so they could alter any information they deemed necessary. The interviews were approximately one hour in length.

DATA ANALYSIS

Quantitative Data Analysis

Quantitative data were collected using survey questionnaires via the web-based platform, SurveyMonkey. Through SurveyMonkey's analytical tools, descriptive statistics were computed for the Likert-scale items to learn response frequencies, percentages, and weighted average. Initially, the top five external and internal professional development choices selected as most valuable, determined by computing the weighted average, were then used to guide the questions in the qualitative portion of the study. The data were also imported into SPSS for further analysis to reveal if there were any correlations with answer selection and demographic information, such as years in the field, type of institution employed, and areas of supervision.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Qualitative data were collected through face-to-face, one-on-one interviews. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed thoroughly upon completion of all six interviews. Siedman (2013) suggested waiting to conduct an in-depth analysis of the interviews until interviews are complete as to not impose meaning from one interview onto the next. Each interview was audio recorded and the researcher took notes as well. The benefit of recording the interview is to have the participant's words and thoughts as the basis for analysis rather than the researcher's paraphrasing and summarization, which can be inaccurate.

When analyzing the data, the researcher first identified which interview questions aligned with survey questions. The purpose of the interviews were to provide substance and rationale to gain an understanding of why survey respondents answered in certain ways. The transcripts were combed through and themes were revealed. These themes were then interpreted by the researcher and acted as the color commentary to the quantitative data collected in the survey. Each interviewee received a copy of the transcription to review prior to analysis and member checks were completed once analysis began.

ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER

Qualifications

At the time of this study, the researcher was a third-year doctoral student who had successfully completed qualitative and quantitative research courses. The researcher had also passed the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) Program certification in the social and behavioral sciences curriculum. The researcher was employed full-time at an Illinois community college in student affairs throughout the duration of the study.

Biases

Although not a mid-level manager according to the study criteria, the researcher was in a role which fit the definition of mid-level manager according to other researchers (Rosser, 2000; R. B. Young, 2007). The researcher attempted to maintain neutrality throughout the study. Since the researcher was employed at an Illinois

community college for eight years, the researcher did have professional relationships with multiple participants.

TIMELINE

Time Span

The pilot study for this research was conducted in July 2015. The actual survey research took place October 6–November 9, 2015, and the interviews were held December 17–22, 2015.

Chronology of Events and Procedures

- June 2015: Initial survey constructed
- July–August 2015: Pilot study conducted
- October 6–November 9, 2015: Phase one survey research conducted
- November 30, 2015: Phase two participants contacted
- December 17–22, 2015: Interviews conducted
- November 2015–May 2016: Data analysis

SUMMARY/COHERENCY OF DESIGN

Validity/Trustworthiness

In an effort to ensure validity, the researcher employed multiple tactics: data collection instruments were grounded in research and replicated from a previous study, a pilot study was conducted to test the effectiveness of the instrument, data were

collected both quantitatively and qualitatively, and member checks occurred with interview participants.

Limitations

The primary objective of this study was to identify the professional development preferences of mid-level student affairs managers in community colleges. The research was conducted using professionals in the state of Illinois, which limits the generalizability of the results. However, using a mixed methods data collection approach assisted in verifying the accuracy of the findings.

FORECAST CHAPTER FOUR

Findings from both the quantitative and qualitative phases of the study are presented in Chapter Four.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH RESULTS

FINDINGS

In seeking to understand the meaning and importance of professional development to community college student affairs mid-level managers, the following research questions were addressed in this study: (1) What types of professional development do community college student affairs mid-level managers value as important? (2) What factors are associated with selection of professional development? (3) What barriers are associated with selection of professional development? Utilizing the mixed methods approach outlined in Chapter Three, the researcher was able to collect data to amply satisfy the goals of the study. This chapter presents a summary of data produced by the study design as follows: description of sample, findings from the research questions, and a summary of results.

DESCRIPTION OF SURVEY SAMPLE

The study sample encompassed student affairs mid-level managers at Illinois community colleges. For the purposes of this research, a mid-level manager was defined as a student affairs professional who had programmatic or departmental responsibility and reports directly to the chief student affairs officer (Diaz, 2013). At the time of this study there were 48 community colleges in Illinois with an unknown total population of

mid-level managers that met the study definition. Every college was invited to participate in the study. Fifty-six professionals began the survey and ultimately 48 professionals completed the survey in its entirety

Descriptive Data about Survey Sample

Years as a Mid-Level Manager

The majority (41.7%) of the survey population were mid-level managers for a length of 1–5 years, 29.2% of participants for 6–10 years, and 16.7% for 11–15 years. Those who had been mid-level managers for under one year, as well as those over 16 years, both comprised 6.3% of participants (Figure 1).

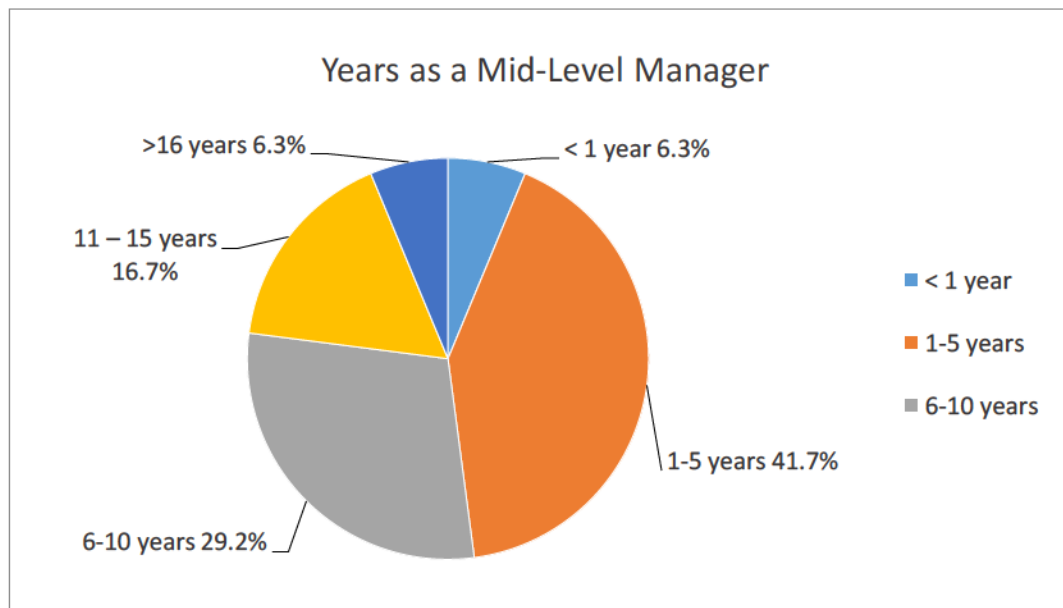


Figure 1. Years as a Mid-Level Manager

Education Level

Respondents were asked to share their highest level of education completed. The majority (75%) of respondents had a master's degree, 12.5% had a bachelor's degree, and 8.5% earned a doctoral degree. Those who had earned an associate's degree comprised 2.1% of the total population, as did those with an educational specialist certification (Figure 2).

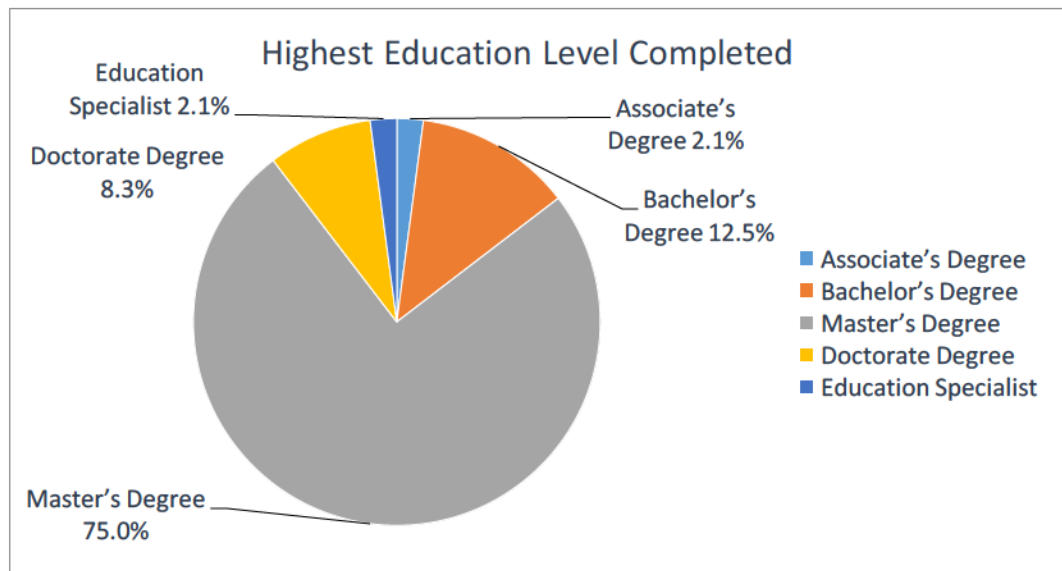


Figure 2. Highest Educational Level Completed

Institution Size

Respondents were asked to identify the size of their institution based on annual full-time student equivalency. Of the 48 professionals who completed the survey, 35.4% were employed at institutions serving 5,000 students or less. Another 35.4% worked at institutions serving 5,001–10,000 students. The third largest portion of survey respondents (22.9%) worked at institutions serving 10,001–15,000 students. Lastly, 6.3%

of respondents were employed at institutions serving 15,001–20,000 students annually (Figure 3).

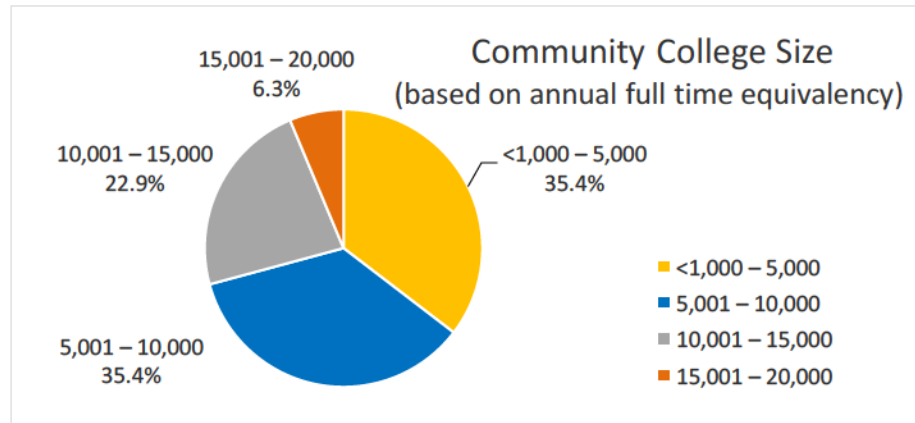


Figure 3. Community College Size

The comparison between the institutional size of survey completers and the statewide composition of institutions is a fair resemblance. According to the Illinois Community College Board 2015 Enrollment Summary, 60.4% of institutions served 5,000 students or less, 29.2% of institutions served between 5,001–10,000 students, 8.3% of institutions served between 10,001–15,000 students, and 2.1% of institutions served between 15,001–20,000 students annually.

Location of Institution

According to the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, 50% of respondents were employed at suburban institutions, 45.7% rural, and 4.3% urban (Figure 4).

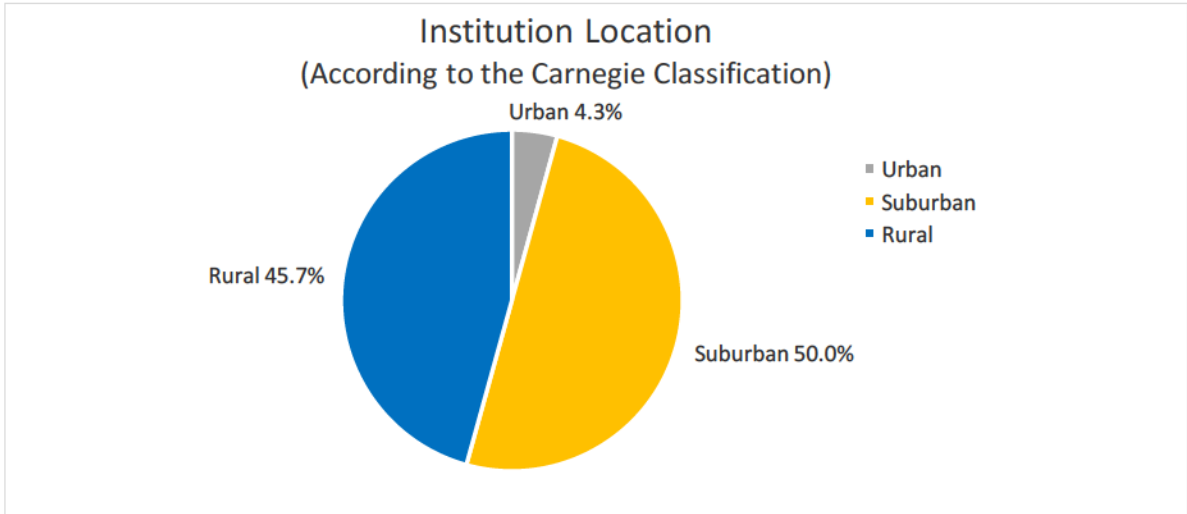


Figure 4. Institution Location

Areas Supervised

To gain a better understanding of the population study, survey completers were asked to identify areas of supervision, specifically the five most time-consuming areas (or less if they oversaw less than five functional areas). The most frequently marked functional areas supervised were Academic Advising/Transfer (29.2%), Admissions/Recruitment (27.1%), Student Success and Retention (27.1%), Registration (25%), and Records/Evaluation (22.9%). Full responses are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: *Functional Areas Supervised*

FUNCTIONAL AREA SUPERVISED	RESPONSE PERCENT
Academic Advising/Transfer	29.2%
Admissions/Recruitment	27.1%
Student Success and Retention	27.1%
Registration	25.0%
Records/Evaluation	22.9%
Articulation	16.7%
Financial Aid	16.7%
Other (please specify)	16.7%
Accessibility and Disability Services	14.6%
Assessment and Placement	14.6%
Career	14.6%
Student Activities	14.6%
Counseling	12.5%
Veterans	12.5%
Academic Support/Tutoring	10.4%
First Year Experience	10.4%
Orientation	10.4%
Student Conduct/Judicial	10.4%
Athletics/Intramurals	6.3%
Childcare	6.3%
Multicultural Affairs	4.2%
Developmental Education	2.1%
Housing and Residence Life	2.1%
Library	2.1%
Service-Learning/Volunteerism	2.1%
Health and Wellness	0.0%

DESCRIPTION OF INTERVIEW SAMPLE

Six professionals who completed the online survey volunteered and completed face-to-face interviews. The interview was designed to gain an understanding of why mid-level managers valued professional development and provide the researcher more insight as to the importance of the top-ranked activities as determined by the survey results. Interviewees elaborated on the impact of professional development, selection factors and barriers to participation, and benefits gained as a result of completion. The six interviewees were Portia, Rey, Doug, Laura, Robert, and Marybeth. These are pseudonyms to ensure their confidentiality.

Portia is in a Dean position overseeing Enrollment Services functions. She has worked in higher education for 24 years—19 of those years in a community college and 3 years as a mid-level manager. Portia has earned a master's degree.

Rey is a Coordinator of a Diversity Center. For 10 out of his 23 years in higher education, he has been a mid-level manager. He has spent 8 years in a community college student affairs professional. Rey has earned a master's degree.

Doug has been a mid-level manager in a community college for 3 years, serving in a Dean of Students capacity. He has a total of 15 years working as a student affairs professional in higher education. Doug has earned a doctoral degree.

Laura has the longest career as a student affairs professional in higher education of all the interviewees, having completed 29 years in the field. She has been at a community college for 20 years and in a mid-level manager role for 16 years. Laura is a Director responsible for Enrollment Services and has earned a doctoral degree.

Robert is the newest professional interviewed in this study. He has been a community college student affairs mid-level manager for 2 years. He is a Testing Center Coordinator, which is his first position in higher education. He has earned an education specialist degree, a post-master's degree.

Marybeth is also a Director of Enrollment Services with an earned doctoral degree. She has been employed in higher education for 21 years—11 as a student affairs professional, and 9 as a community college mid-level manager.

GENERAL FINDINGS

Purpose of Professional Development for Mid-Level Managers

Data indicate professional development is valued by mid-level managers; over 87% of survey respondents felt it was either somewhat or very important to intentionally design a professional development plan. None of the respondents felt it was not at all important (Figure 5).

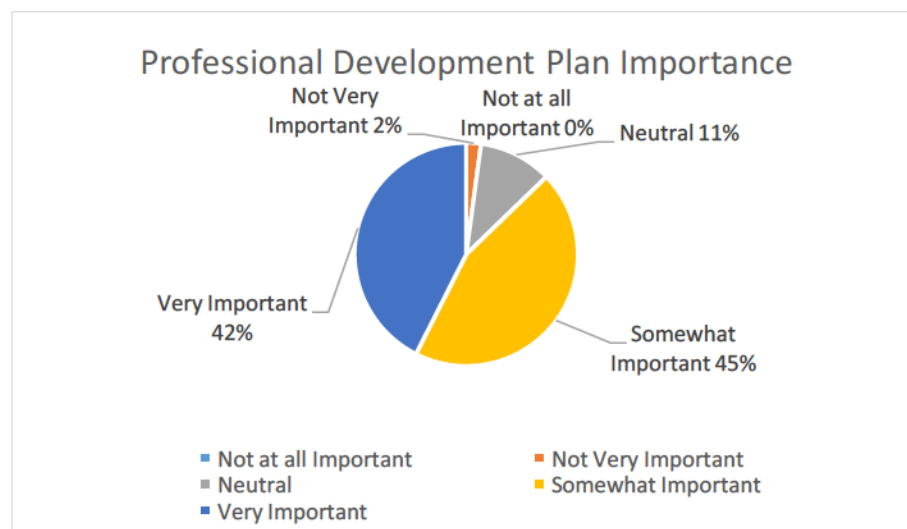


Figure 5. Professional Development Plan Importance

According to interview participants, professional development can include anything that assists in building skills, abilities, and competency to be more effective in a current position and/or for an aspired position. Doug believes professional development is an opportunity or a resource to further someone's proficiencies in what they use at work. Rey notes professional development can help in bettering yourself as a leader and Marybeth thinks it is important to allow people to explore areas of interest. Interviews revealed the overarching purpose of professional development for mid-level managers is to better the institution, department, and students served and, furthermore, the purpose of professional development evolves as careers progress.

A general theme in regard to the purpose of professional development specifically for mid-level managers is to better the institution, department, and students. Robert states professional development

can make me a better manager or it's something that in what I get from it, I can bring back and share with my workers to make things — to make what we do better and not just better for us, but that could be just even better for the students.

Rey furthered this sentiment when stating,

It's important for me — for my craft and for what I give the college that I understand the best practices, the research, and what's happening so that I could bring that information injected in what I do at the college.

Portia firmly believed mid-level managers have a fiduciary responsibility to college taxpayers to learn the best way to optimize resources and know what is trending in the field, which is learned through professional development.

The second theme that arose in regards to the role of professional development for mid-level managers was the fact that professional development preferences change

throughout one's career. Interviewees shared there is a shift in needs from a new professional to a mid-level manager in regards to what one looks for in professional development. Laura's professional development needs changed as she grew into the profession. She summed it up by stating,

I think at different periods in my career, professional development meant different things. So early on, it was learning more about my functional area. What are the financial aid rules? How do I master those? What are exceptions? Then it sort of moved into, well, how do I lead an office? And that especially went into, well, what are the rules where I'm hiring? Firing? Project management?

Doug referenced that as a mid-level manager, he is frequently asked to take on additional responsibilities that requires further learning and tends to be the focus of his professional development. However, he notes it is important to cycle back to topics of familiarity from when he was a newer professional in order to maintain a level of knowledge amongst a variety of issues.

Professional Development Benefits

The primary benefit of participating in professional development was learning something that led to an improvement in college services. Although interviewees valued learning for the sheer sake of filling a knowledge gap, the most predominant benefit was rooted in making a positive impact at the college. Each mid-level manager stated they found importance in being able to put what they learned into practice. Doug believes professional development is beneficial when he can apply it or if he "felt like it raised awareness to thinking about things a different way." Robert stated there were four benefits of professional development: (1) enhance departmental processes,

(2) better himself as a manager, (3) educate others, and (4) career progression.

Interviewees concurred the benefits of professional development reach far beyond the mid-level manager; colleagues, students, and the institution are positively impacted when a mid-level manager actively engages in professional development.

FINDINGS RELATED TO RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Research Question 1

The first research question examines the value placed upon professional development for community college student affairs mid-level managers, specifically in terms of the type of available offerings. Professional development was broken into two categories, internal and external, to better identify the preferences of the population. Internal professional development refers to programs/activities coordinated by the participant's institution. External professional development refers to programs/activities *not* coordinated by the participant's institution, but may be sponsored by the institution.

The survey produced data that determined the most commonly participated in professional development activities within 12 months from the date of survey completion, both internally and externally. The survey data also determined what the study population deemed the most important internal and external professional development activities. Interview questions were aimed to identify why mid-level managers found value in the activities determined most important.

Internal Professional Development

Participation in Internal Professional Development

The study sample was provided a list of internal professional development activities and was asked to indicate participation in the activity within the last 12 months from the date of survey completion. The most highly participated internal professional development exercises were participation in in-service staff development programs or courses (97.92%); completed formal, written performance review for others (85.42%); participated in special institutional task forces, committees, and/or commissions (85.42%); taken on additional responsibilities above and beyond specific job description (79.17%); provided in-service staff development programs for others (72.92%); and provided informal mentoring/coaching for others (70.83%). All other items were significantly lower in participation (Table 2).

Table 2: *Internal Professional Development Participation*

INTERNAL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT	RESPONSE PERCENT
Participated in in-service staff development programs or courses	97.9%
Completed formal, written performance review for others	85.4%
Participated in special institutional task forces, committees, and/or commissions	85.4%
Taken on additional responsibilities above and beyond specific job description	79.2%
Provided in-service staff development programs for others	72.9%
Provided informal mentoring/coaching for others	70.8%
Taken on a temporary task or job rotation	47.9%
Received informal mentoring/coaching from senior staff member	47.9%
Provided purposeful career counseling for others	43.8%
Provided formal mentoring/coaching for others	29.2%
Received formal mentoring/coaching from senior staff member	14.6%
Other (please specify)	2.1%
Applied for a sabbatical or study leave	0.0%
None of the above	0.0%

Importance of Internal Professional Development

Survey results reveal the internal professional development deemed most important aligned closely with what respondents participated in throughout the last year. Participants were asked to select the level of importance for internal professional development exercises based on a 5-point Likert scale. Respondents could select *not at all important*, *not very important*, *neutral*, *somewhat important*, or *very important*. The answers were weighted from 0 to 5 with *not at all important* as a 0 and *very important* as a 5.

The most important types of internal professional development, as deemed by the rating average, were participation at in-service staff development programs or courses (4.35); completion of formal, written performance review for others (4.34); receipt of informal mentoring/coaching from senior staff member (4.33); participation in special institutional task forces, committees, and/or commissions (4.33); providing informal mentoring/coaching for others (4.30). Full responses are shown in Table 3. Those interviewed in phase two of the study elaborated on their thoughts of the five most highly rated internal professional development activities, which are summarized in the forthcoming sections.

Participated in inservice staff development programs or courses

As the most highly rated internal professional development activity, participation at in-service staff development programs was also the most frequently taken advantage of. The majority of those interviewed strongly agreed these activities provide great value to mid-level managers. Marybeth, Doug, and Portia mentioned they found college-wide programs of high importance because of the opportunity to interact with colleagues from around the institution. They referenced the benefits of creating community, building morale, and establishing relationships across campus. Marybeth said,

Staff have helped develop them or give ideas for future ones and that builds morale. I have done them as a leader with other leaders. So it kind of builds a community practice that you can go back to and have conversations with which is a relationship-building piece.

Table 3: *Internal Professional Development Importance Ratings*

INTERNAL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT	NOT AT ALL IMPORTANT	NOT VERY IMPORTANT	NEUTRAL	SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	RATING AVERAGE
Participated in in-service staff development programs or courses	0	0	2	27	19	4.35
Completed formal, written performance review for others	3	1	4	8	31	4.34
Received informal mentoring/coaching from senior staff member	2	2	3	11	28	4.33
Participated in special institutional task forces, committees, and/or commissions	0	1	2	25	20	4.33
Provided informal mentoring/coaching for others	1	0	5	19	22	4.30
Provided in-service staff development programs for others	0	1	8	18	20	4.21
Taken on additional responsibilities above and beyond specific job description	0	1	8	22	16	4.13
Provided purposeful career counseling (or career review to plan ways to acquire additional skills, education, and training) for others	1	5	12	16	13	3.74
Received formal mentoring/coaching from senior staff member	2	2	15	16	10	3.67
Provided formal mentoring/coaching for others	1	2	16	17	8	3.66
Taken on a temporary task or job rotation	3	2	17	17	7	3.50
Applied for a sabbatical or study leave	15	2	22	4	1	2.41

Furthermore, Robert and Doug enjoy learning about different practices happening around the college and new services offered to students.

Completed formal, written performance review for others

Although the majority of those interviewed stated they had never considered completing a formal, written performance review of others as professional development until this study, it ranked as the second most important internal professional development activity. Benefits of completing performance reviews included learning how to have difficult conversations with supervisees, identifying ways to be a more effective supervisor, and reflecting on how to create the desired work environment. Portia acknowledged she takes these very seriously and documents happenings all year long, which, in turn, helps her learn more about her staff and has her thinking continuously of how to best help them; she emphasized it is a very reflective process. MaryBeth felt there was value in being able to articulate thoughts objectively on paper knowing it is going in someone's file and recognizing the seriousness of this responsibility.

Receiving informal mentoring/coaching from senior staff member

Informal mentorship relationships were highly valued by mid-level managers. According to Gibson, Tesone, and Buchalski (2000), informal mentoring is an organic relationship that occurs between colleagues due to an existing comfort and connection. There are no pre-established goals or meeting schedule. An example of informal mentoring is when a new employee forms a relationship with a colleague who has been at the institution for a longer time and seeks advice from the more-tenured employee

on navigating college politics and processes. Conversely, formal mentoring is likely a coordinated approach with a specific set of goals pre-determined at the start of the process. An example of formal mentoring is when a new professional signs up for a mentorship through a professional association and is paired with a more seasoned professional. In this setting, meeting schedules, discussion topics, and the overall goal of mentorship is clearly defined.

Receiving informal mentoring/coaching from senior staff member was deemed by the survey as the third most important internal professional development activity. Interviewees unanimously agreed there was great value in receiving mentoring; however, the mentoring did not need to come from a senior staff member. In fact, all agreed the position held by the mentor was not as important as the knowledge and experiences the mentor had to share. Doug thought an effective mentoring relationship occurred when the mentor provided the mentee a view outside of their wheelhouse. He stated the mentor could be anyone — a colleague or faculty member — as long as there is a purposeful relationship. Marybeth said she absolutely appreciated informal mentoring and aptly stated, “You only know from your view and usually you don't know what you don't know.”

Laura shared she has been the recipient of mentoring by colleagues within the profession, outside of the organization. She felt this provided her a broader lens of the profession. Rey had a similar experience with Laura in the sense he found the most value receiving mentoring when it came from outside of the organization. He said he had a few informal mentors throughout his career that has led him to great resources

within the field and he still receives informal mentoring from a former supervisor that has left the college.

A few interviewees also shared their perspective on receiving formal mentoring. Portia participated in a mentorship program at her institution and found it very valuable. She enjoyed learning fresh ideas and being exposed to a different perspective. Robert also participated in a formal mentorship program at his college and he was paired with someone from Facilities who had been at the institution for years. Robert appreciated the knowledge he gained about the history, culture, and politics of the organization. He liked having a person to talk to about the college that was unaffiliated with his division. Rey expressed interest in participating in a formal mentoring process if his institution offered the opportunity.

Participation in special institutional task forces or committees

The fourth highest-ranked internal professional development activity was participation in a special institutional task force or commission. Benefits affirmed by the interview subjects were connecting with colleagues across institutional divisions, becoming familiar on a topic/area of interest that you normally are not involved, and assisting with career advancement. Laura declared she finds value in special institutional committees because

It helps me understand what the college as a whole faces as far as thinking about what challenges can we support? What resources do we have? What successes do we have? It's a broader base of knowledge in order to be able to think about how a college moves forward in doing things. Definitely there's something about the individuals that's on a committee and building a relationship with them so that you can often cut across a lot of red tape.

Marybeth found that due to these opportunities she is able to work on projects she never thought she would be doing and it has thus allowed her to grow professionally giving her a “voice at the table.” Doug believes this professional development activity is of great benefit in regards to career advancement. He shared,

I think if you want to advance into certain positions, you may want to have experience with certain committees. For example, if you're an administrator on the student affairs side of the house and you want to get more involved with some of the academic affairs, try to be part of the academic calendar committee or being able to attend a curriculum council. It is important to have that experience if you want to look at moving into positions of provost or presidents down the road.

Rey found special task forces a great privilege yet noted the inherent challenge is that it can be an exclusive group always given the opportunity to participate in these opportunities. Although there may be interest in joining a special committee, it may not always be available. Conversely, Portia stated she is on many institutional task forces and struggles to find these beneficial because of the time it takes away from her primary job responsibilities.

Provided informal mentoring/coaching for others

Ranked as the fifth most important internal professional development opportunity, interviewees repeatedly proclaimed providing informal mentoring was one of their favorite parts of their job. Portia felt mentoring was very satisfying to her at this point in her career and it was gratifying to feel like she had a stake in the success of and growth of others. Doug says mentoring, as with all professional development helps make the individual and the campus better. He believes it is important to give back and do the same for others that others have done for him. When reflecting upon mentoring

others, Laura stated, "It makes me think deeper about their needs versus my needs or what is the organization's needs versus my needs, and what is the disconnect between their skills, ability, knowledge in order to handle those challenges."

Mentoring did not have to be only between colleagues within the institution. Rey is highly involved in regional and statewide diversity organizations and serves as a mentor to his colleagues at other institutions. He was very excited discussing the ways he informally mentors others and affirmed,

It's extremely important that I keep reinforcing to people the best practices, the resources, the books, the journals, and the speakers that we should be bringing in to address executives on how to effectively run a campus diversity effort. I know that despite what my situation is at this institution, it's ten times worse with some of my colleagues at other institutions.

Networking with other mid-level managers, regular feedback from direct supervisor, and knowledge and/or skill-based professional development opportunities were added by participants in the "other" category.

External Professional Development

Participation in External Professional Development

The survey population of the study was provided a list of external professional development and was asked to indicate participation within the last 12 months from the date of survey completion. The most highly participated internal professional development activities were these: read a professional journal article directly related to student affairs (87.5%), attended an online specialized workshop or seminar (e.g.,

webinar) (85.4%), attended a professional association convention (83.3%), and attended an in-person specialized workshop or seminar (79.2%) (Table 4).

Table 4: *External Professional Development Participation*

EXTERNAL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT	RESPONSE PERCENT	RESPONSE COUNT
Read a professional journal article directly related to student affairs	87.5%	42
Attended an online specialized workshop or seminar (e.g., webinar)	85.4%	41
Attended a professional association convention	83.3%	40
Attended an in-person specialized workshop or seminar	79.2%	38
Read a book directly related to student affairs	33.3%	16
Made a presentation at conference	33.3%	16
Performed independent research on a topic	29.2%	14
Completed formal education related to field (e.g., coursework)	18.8%	9
Served on board of directors for a state or regional organization	12.5%	6
Attended a higher education management institute	8.3%	4
Other (please specify)	8.3%	4
Performed as an external consultant	6.3%	3
Served on board of directors for a national organization	6.3%	3
Authored/coauthored a manuscript for publication	4.2%	2
Participated in a national fellowship or leadership program	0.0%	0
None of the above	0.0%	0

Importance of External Professional Development

Survey results revealed the external professional development most important to mid-level managers aligned closely with what respondents participated in within the

last year. Participants were asked to select the level of importance for internal professional development based on a 5-point Likert scale. Respondents could select *not at all important, not very important, neutral, somewhat important, or very important*. The answers were weighted from 0 to 5 with *not at all important* as a 0 and *very important* as a 5.

The six most important types of external professional development, as deemed by the rating average, were the following: attended a professional association convention (4.59), read a professional journal article directly related to student affairs (4.52), attended an in-person specialized workshop or seminar (4.48), attended an online specialized workshop or seminar (4.25), read a book directly related to student affairs (3.93), and completed formal education related to field (3.65). Full responses are shown in Table 5. Those interviewed in phase two of the study elaborated on their thoughts of the six most highly rated external professional development activities, which are summarized in the forthcoming sections.

Attended a professional association convention

Attending a professional association convention was the most important external professional development activity according to survey results. Those interviewed enthusiastically agreed attending conferences is of the utmost value. Rey believes going to conferences is “monumentally important” for his professional development because of the knowledge he gains from colleagues. Repeatedly, mid-level managers stated they benefited from the networking, knowledge-sharing, and skill-building that occurs in this setting. Robert looks forward to learning from others on how

Table 5: *External Professional Development Importance Ratings*

EXTERNAL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT	NOT AT ALL IMPORTANT	NOT VERY IMPORTANT	NEUTRAL	SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	RATING AVERAGE
Attended a professional association convention	0	0	1	16	27	4.59
Read a professional journal article directly related to student affairs	0	0	3	17	28	4.52
Attended an in-person specialized workshop or seminar	0	0	3	18	25	4.48
Attended an online specialized workshop or seminar (e.g., webinar)	1	2	3	20	22	4.25
Read a book directly related to student affairs	0	2	8	26	9	3.93
Completed formal education related to field (e.g., coursework)	1	1	19	17	8	3.65
Made a presentation at conference	1	4	17	16	10	3.63
Attended a higher education management institute	1	1	21	18	5	3.54
Participated in a national fellowship or leadership program	3	4	21	13	5	3.28
Performed independent research on a topic	4	5	18	12	7	3.28
Served on board of directors for a state or regional organization	4	9	20	10	3	2.98
Served on board of directors for a national organization	4	9	20	11	2	2.96
Authored/coauthored a manuscript for publication	8	9	19	7	3	2.74
Performed as an external consultant	8	11	19	7	1	2.61

to improve his processes. Laura appreciates the external ideas and different points of view that she can't get on her campus. Doug echoed similar sentiments as the others and also expanded on the value in presenting and/or volunteering at a conference. He feels he is at a point in his career where he should be developing others. Portia felt the most effective conferences are when all participants are there for the same subject matter and the topic is focused.

Read a professional journal article directly related to student affairs

Reading a professional journal article directly related to student affairs was the second-most important external professional development activity. The most recognized benefit from reading articles was the ability to quickly and easily stay up to date in the field, whether it be learning of new appraises or getting a refresher. Rey shares articles with his college leadership to advocate for his department.

So when I advocate for things, I'm telling my colleagues, "These are not just anecdotes." This is what best practices say. This is what research says you should be considering with regards to this aspect of your diversity effort. And it gives me ammunition to go to an executive and say, "This is why we need to do this, and I know it's going to cost some money, and I know it's going to require some reorganization, but if you look at best practices based on the journals that I have read, this is what you really need to do if you want your diversity effort to work effectively."

Marybeth admits she does not read as much as she probably she should, but stated she can be weary of articles because the studies can be narrow in scope.

Attended an in-person specialized workshop or seminar

The third most important external professional development activity, attending an in-person specialized workshop, was valued by the study participants for multiple

reasons. Interviewees found these a beneficial way to receive expert training and detailed knowledge on specific subject matter. Doug referenced a recent workshop he attended on Title IX legislation in which he had an explicit purpose for attending and was able to implement the knowledge gained immediately. Laura participated in a management workshop when she first started supervisor others as a way to build that competency. Robert likes to use these opportunities to interact not only with the presenter, but also those attending because he feels the conversations and questions are indispensable.

Attended an online specialized workshop or seminar

The fourth most important external professional development activity was attending an online specialized workshop, also commonly referred to as a webinar. Webinars produced mixed reactions for the majority of participants; there was a love-hate relationship. Mid-level managers appreciated their low-cost, flexible scheduling, and time-savings. Many referenced they will participate in a webinar at their desk while checking email, eating lunch, or working on other tasks. Participant shared while they may prefer the type of interaction which occurs in a face-to-face setting, they cannot always be out of the office and budgets are tight so webinars are the next best thing. With all the distractions and lack of focus one can give to a computer screen, Laura commented,

I think we all wish to gain something from them, but the outcome is still questionable in my mind. Well, I think that's part of what the audience isn't doing, but again, it's one-way delivery. It doesn't provide two-way communication. I mean, you might be able to type in a question to the

presenter, but depending on how many questions they get, they may not even answer.

Read a book directly related to student affairs

Reading a book directly related to student affairs was the fifth most important external professional development activity. Only one of the mid-level managers interviewed found great value in this exercise and two shared they found little to no importance in reading a student affairs book. However, many indicated reading a personal development book was very worthwhile. Participants stated there are books about leadership, management, personality styles, and so forth that help them become better professionals due to the self-reflection of their own skills.

Completed formal education related to field

Since reading a journal article directly related to student affairs and reading a book directly related to student affairs were extremely similar in scope, the researcher asked interview participants about the importance of the sixth most highly rated professional development activity, completing formal education related to the field. Five of the six interviewed have completed formal education related to the field and three have a doctoral degree with a higher education focus. Marybeth is currently pursuing an endorsement in a specific student affairs area on top of her doctoral degree. Laura stated completing her doctoral degree was a life-changing experience. She felt firsthand the struggles of our current students, which she believes makes her a better professional. Since Robert is new to student affairs, he has an interest in taking some credits specifically in higher education, but has not yet had the opportunity. Multiple

mid-level managers noted completing formal education, especially a doctoral degree, is excellent for career advancement.

Summary of Research Question 1: Professional Development Preferences

Internal and external professional development preferences were identified through the use of a quantitative survey and results were elaborated upon during face-to-face interviews. According to survey results shared earlier, the most important types of internal professional development were participation at in-service staff development programs or courses, completion of formal, written performance review for others, receipt of informal mentoring/coaching from senior staff member, participation in special institutional task forces, committees and/or commissions, and providing informal mentoring/coaching for others.

Survey results revealed the most favorable external professional development activities were attendance at a professional association convention, read a professional journal article directly related to student affairs, attendance at an in-person specialized workshop or seminar, attending an online specialized workshop or seminar, read a book directly related to student affairs, and completed formal education related to field.

Research Question 2

Professional Development Selection Factors

The second research question explored the factors that influence the selection of professional development for community college student affairs mid-level managers. Study participants were asked to choose the level of importance of multiple factors

when selecting professional development based on a 5-point Likert scale. Respondents could select *not at all important*, *not very important*, *neutral*, *somewhat important*, or *very important*. The answers were weighted from 0 to 5 with *not at all important* as a 0 and *very important* as 5.

Skill-building (4.71) was rated the most important factor when selecting professional development. Other factors included networking (4.48), institutional expectations (4.35), personal reflection/wellness (4.25), geographic location (4.25), career advancement (4.0), and the sponsoring organization (3.98) (Table 6).

Table 6: *Professional Development Selection Factors Ratings*

SELECTION FACTORS	NOT AT ALL IMPORTANT	NOT VERY IMPORTANT	NEUTRAL	SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	RATING AVERAGE
Skill-Building	0	0	0	14	34	4.71
Networking	1	0	1	19	27	4.48
Institutional Expectation	0	1	5	18	24	4.35
Personal Reflection/Wellness	0	2	3	24	19	4.25
Geographic Location	0	2	4	22	20	4.25
Career Advancement	1	3	4	27	13	4.00
Sponsoring Organization	0	2	9	25	12	3.98

Mid-level managers interviewed expanded on the criteria they consider when selecting professional development. The two most important factors according to the survey (skill-building and networking) were mentioned frequently throughout the interviews as the main reasons for professional development. When evaluating

professional development opportunities, mid-level managers assess their ability to build skills, network with other professionals, and also potentially fill a gap in their resume.

Rey felt these factors were of utmost importance when selecting his professional development and he shared,

I look for what is going to help me either in my current position, particularly if there is a project that I'm about to embark on that I'm not as knowledgeable on it as I would like to be, and then if I know that learning this is going to enhance my chances of getting a job of the future. I also look at the lineup of speakers and say, "That could be someone who I would really want to get to know or network with."

In close alignment with skill-building, participants referenced selecting professional development based on program topic and presenter to amplify maximum skill-building. As they progressed within their careers, they felt they were able to more critically inspect professional development activities to determine its value.

Beyond these primary factors, time and cost were other important factors shared by interviewees as a consideration when selecting professional development. When discussing time, interviewees shared they struggle to find the time to be away from their daily responsibilities. Portia's statements were depictive of others' viewpoints: "If I go to a conference I'm working 12 hour days for days before that and for days when I get back, plus I'm checking my emails the whole time." She noted the timing of the activity is also critical: "Is it during a busy period? Are there other things going on?" Since mid-level managers often juggle many responsibilities, it can be very difficult to be out of the office for extended periods even on work-related business. These time concerns were a primary reason mid-level managers appreciated webinars.

The cost of the activity was another selection factor. Doug remarked he aims to be judicious and a good steward of professional development funding. Portia wants to make sure she “gets the most bang for her buck.” Although most managers were not feeling like the cost of the activity was a substantial influence on their decision, it was always to be considered, especially in Illinois’ current budget crisis.

Summary of Research Question 2: Selection Factors

Skill-building was rated the most important factor when selecting professional development. In rank order, other factors included networking, institutional expectations, personal reflection/wellness, geographic location, career advancement, and, lastly, the sponsoring organization. Time and cost were two additional factors discussed repeatedly during the interview portion of the study which were prominent for mid-level managers.

Research Question 3

Professional Development Barriers

Survey completers were asked to indicate barriers encountered when selecting professional development. Participants could select all options that applied. The two most frequently selected options were having limited time (70.8%) and lack of funding (66.7%). All other barriers received less than a 25% response. A participant noted balancing family constraints as another barrier to professional development. See Table 7 for full responses.

Table 7: *Professional Development Barriers Ratings*

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT BARRIERS	RESPONSE PERCENT	RESPONSE COUNT
Limited time for professional development	70.8%	34
Lack of funding available for participation	66.7%	32
Limited organizational support for professional development activities	22.9%	11
Lack of opportunity to take on leadership roles	22.9%	11
Limited opportunities for middle management dialogue and reflection	22.9%	11
Lack of similar needs among middle managers	16.7%	8
Lack of mentoring/networking opportunities	14.6%	7
Other (please specify)	4.2%	2
Lack of appropriate degree or educational credential	2.1%	1
No barriers	2.1%	1

Mid-level managers indicated time was a major factor when selecting professional development. As the literature demonstrated in Chapter Two, mid-level managers are responsible for day-to-day college operations and job duties are increasing. Taking time away from routine job tasks and daily office management for professional development whether it is for an hour webinar, participating in a half-day mentorship program, or attending a multiple day conference, can be challenging. There is a delicate balance between pursuing professional development and accomplishing work tasks.

The interviews exposed personal constraints as a barrier to participating in professional development, especially in regard to attending conferences, workshops, or any programs off-campus and/or outside of normal work hours. Juggling family

commitments is a common responsibility for mid-level managers and Doug aptly stated, “Being able to know where that day of your work starts and the day that your work ends is important. Attending professional conferences have become much more challenging since I've had children.”

Although lack of funding was ranked in the survey as a sizable barrier to professional development, those interviewed were not overly concerned with lack of funding. The professionals shared an outlook that they needed to be responsible with college funds and use professional development monies in an appropriate manner. They were absolutely conscious of cost; however, if there was a program they were interested in, cost was not usually a restriction for involvement. Marybeth felt her college truly valued professional development and even with the budget cuts, professionals could still use those funds. Rey noted his institution cut travel funds due to the state’s budget impasse, which limits his professional development. Rey also shared there is not much financial support for pursuing formal coursework and this severely impacted his ability to complete a doctoral degree.

The majority of respondents were able to spend their allocated professional development funds as they wished. They were satisfied with the opportunities they received and the support given by their supervisors for their continued professional development. In fact, Robert felt he did not have any barriers to pursuing professional development.

Summary of Research Question 3: Professional Development Barriers

In the survey portion of the study, the two most frequently selected barriers to professional development were having limited time and lack of funding. Interviews revealed mid-level managers are not faced with many barriers to professional development. In fact, participants generally feel supported by their supervisors and college leadership to participate as they feel appropriate.

SIGNIFICANCE OF DATA

Data collected through the survey were analyzed using SPSS software to identify any correlations between participant demographics and their views of professional development. Analysis revealed few correlations of significance and due to the lack of distribution in the sample size, the results are not generalizable. Significance is a correlation equal or less than .05 and marginally significant is less than 1.

Educational Attainment

There was a consistent relationship between those with higher levels of educational attainment and their participation in professional development. Seven of the 26 professional development opportunities in the survey had a marginally significant or significant positive relationship between higher the education level and involvement in professional development. Mid-level managers with higher levels of education tended to participate more in completing formal, written performance review of others, providing purposeful career counseling, providing in-service staff development programs for others, providing informal mentoring, completing formal education related

to field, authoring/co-authoring a manuscript for publication, and serving on a board of directors for a state or regional organization (Table 8).

Table 8: *Highest Degree Attainment and Professional Development Participation Relationship*

VARIABLE	PARTICIPATION IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY	SIGNIFICANCE
Highest Degree Attained	Completed formal, written performance review of others	.074
Highest Degree Attained	Provided purposeful career counseling	.080
Highest Degree Attained	Provided in-service staff development programs for others	.014
Highest Degree Attained	Provided informal mentoring	.001
Highest Degree Attained	Completed formal education related to field	.018
Highest Degree Attained	Authored/co-authored a manuscript for publication	.014
Highest Degree Attained	Served on a board of directors for a state or regional organization	.066

There were no significant correlations between educational attainment and the value placed on internal or external professional development opportunities. However, there was a marginally significant relationship that those with a higher education level placed more value on attending an in-person specialized workshop (Table 9).

Table 9: *Highest Degree Attainment and Professional Development Activity Importance Relationship*

VARIABLE	PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY IMPORTANCE	SIGNIFICANCE
Highest Degree Attained	Attending an in-person specialized workshop	.085

A marginally significant negative relationship was identified between education level and the importance placed on selecting a professional development activity due to

institutional expectation. This means the higher the degree attainment, the less the mid-level manager selected professional development due to an expectation by the institution (Table 10).

Table 10: *Highest Degree Attainment and Professional Development Selection Factor Relationship*

VARIABLE	PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SELECTION FACTORS	SIGNIFICANCE
Highest Degree Attained	Institutional Expectation	.066

Years as a Mid-Level Manager

Data analysis provided little insight as to any correlations between years as a mid-level manager and professional development values. There was one significant finding related to importance of serving as an external consultant being negatively correlated with years in middle management meaning those with less years' experience as a mid-level manager found more value in serving as an external consultant. Marginal significance was found in the relationship of years' experience and receiving both formal and in formal mentoring from a senior staff member in student affairs. In these relationships, the more years as mid-level manager, the more importance was placed on being mentored formally and informally (Table 11).

Table 11: *Years as a Mid-Level Manager and Professional Development Activity Importance Relationship*

VARIABLE	PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY IMPORTANCE	SIGNIFICANCE
Years as a Mid-Level Manager	Formal Mentorship Recipient	.081
Years as a Mid-Level Manager	Informal Mentorship Recipient	.079
Years as a Mid-Level Manager	Serving as an External Consultant	.048

Institution Size

The size of the institution in which the survey participant was employed produced the most significant correlations with professional development preferences. Attending an in-person workshop and an online workshop was more important for professionals at smaller institutions. Reading a book related to student affairs, making a presentation at a conference, serving on a state or regional board, and providing formal mentoring to others was seen as more important to mid-level managers as the institution gets larger (Table 12).

Table 12: *Institution Size and Professional Development Activity Importance Relationship*

VARIABLE	PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY IMPORTANCE	SIGNIFICANCE
Institution Size	Attending an in-person workshop	.037
Institution Size	Attending an online workshop	.055
Institution Size	Reading a book related to student affairs	.046
Institution Size	Presenting at a conference	.035
Institution Size	Serving on a state or regional board	.037
Institution Size	Providing formal mentoring	.043

Significant relationships were also found when analyzing the selection factors and barriers to professional development and institution size. When selecting professional development, geographic location was more important to those at smaller institution. Furthermore, barriers related to lack of opportunity for networking/ mentoring and funding were stronger for those at smaller institutions. Lastly, of marginal significance was the relationship between institution size and the intentionality

of a professional development plan. Developing a professional development plan became less important as the size of the institution grew larger (Table 13).

Table 13: *Institution Size and Professional Development Selection Factor Relationship*

VARIABLE	PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SELECTION FACTORS	SIGNIFICANCE
Institution Size	Geographic Location	.025
Institution Size	Lack of Networking/Mentoring	.006
Institution Size	Funding	.001
Institution Size	Intentionally Developing a Professional Development Plan	.074

SUMMARY AND FORECAST

The data presented in this chapter were collected from 48 mid-level manager survey responses and 6 mid-level manager interview participants. Using a mixed methods approach, the researcher analyzed the quantitative survey data and then conducted qualitative interviews to give more depth and understanding to the findings of the study. Chapter Five will include interpretation of the data presented, implications for practice, and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

REVIEW OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this research was to identify and understand the professional development preferences of community college student affairs mid-level managers. The researcher also aimed to determine the barriers associated with professional development and the notable factors impacting selection. A mid-level manager, according to this study, is defined as a student affairs professional who has programmatic or departmental responsibility and reports directly to the chief student affairs officer (Diaz, 2013).

Chapter One introduced the research by explaining the current status of the problem and the need for further study of the problem. The purpose and significance of the study, its contribution to practice, as well as the approach, limitations, and vocabulary of the study were further detailed in this section. Community colleges are in a state of transformation due to national pressures for increased accountability and degree completion while resources are shrinking (CCCSE, 2012). College presidents across the nation are retiring rapidly and taking with them a wealth of knowledge and experience. These retirements are putting community colleges in the midst of a leadership crisis due to the lack of appropriately trained leaders prepared to take on

more advanced roles (AACC, 2012). And further, the role of the student affairs professional is expanding greatly due to issues including sexual misconduct, behavioral health concerns, student engagement initiatives, and ever-changing financial aid regulations to name a few (Taub & McEwen, 2006; Weis, 2015). Student affairs mid-level managers play a critical role in developing and implementing college initiatives and are prime candidates to move into vacant leadership roles. In this transformational era of community colleges, identifying and understanding professional development preferences of student affairs mid-level managers is vitally important for continued advancement of the community college mission.

Chapter Two detailed the research and relevant literature related to the study. While professional development and student affairs professionals are a topic studied regularly, there is a lack of research devoted to mid-level managers. Most studies explored the professional development needs of chief student affairs officers, especially if desiring a presidency role. The few studies focusing on student affairs mid-level managers were outdated and primarily written by one author.

Research Approach

Chapter Three explains the research approach. To answer the research questions introduced in Chapter One, a mixed methods sequential research study was conducted. Phase One included an online survey followed by face-to-face interviews in Phase Two. Forty-eight Illinois community college student affairs mid-level managers were surveyed using the online web tool, SurveyMonkey, to collect quantitative data. Survey data

identified the most valued internal and external professional development activities, along with notable selection factors and barriers of participations. Using these data, qualitative interviews were conducted with six survey completers to gain insight and understanding of the survey data. The survey and interview questions were adapted with permission from the Diaz (2013) study, which were aligned with the earlier studies of Moore et al. (1985), VanDerLinden (2005), and Winston and Creamer (1997).

The target population for this study was Illinois community college student affairs mid-level managers. Due to the varying organizational charts at each college, it was not possible to ascertain a list of professionals who met the study definition of a mid-level manager. Therefore, the researcher sent the survey to Illinois chief student affairs officers (CSAO) using the Illinois Community College Chief Student Services Officers (ICCCSSO) list serve. This list serve contained the email address of each CSAO in all the 48 community colleges in Illinois. The CSAOs then sent the survey link and introduction to the professionals under their supervision who met the study definition. At the end of the survey, mid-level managers had the option to volunteer to be a part of the face-to-face interviews. Those interested were directed to another webpage to provide their contact information to learn more about the interview process. Of the estimated 240 mid-level managers in the state of Illinois, 48 professionals fully completed the survey and 6 agreed to participate in the interviews.

Chapter Four presented the quantitative and qualitative data gleaned from the surveys and interviews. The chapter was formatted in alignment to the research study questions with interview themes explaining the survey statistics. Using SPSS software,

an analysis was conducted to determine significant or marginally significant correlations between demographic information and responses. This final chapter serves as a means to discuss the findings in relation to the research questions and previous research explained in Chapter Two. Recommendations for further study are also explored.

INTERPRETATIONS OF THE FINDINGS

First Research Question: Implications for Practice

The goal of the first research question was to identify what types of professional development community college student affairs mid-level managers value as important. Since professional development is such a vast topic, the activities were broken into two categories: internal and external. Internal refers to professional development coordinated by the participant's institution whereas external refers to professional development not coordinated (but may be sponsored) by the institution. Quantitative data generated from the survey relative to this question determined the most important internal activities were participation at in-service staff development programs or courses, completion of formal, written performance review for others, receipt of informal mentoring/coaching from senior staff member, participation in special institutional task forces, committees, and/or commissions, and, lastly, providing informal mentoring/coaching for others.

The most important types of external professional development, as deemed by the survey ratings, were attendance at a professional association convention, read a professional journal article directly related to student affairs, attended an in-person

specialized workshop or seminar, attended an online specialized workshop or seminar, read a book directly related to student affairs, and completion of formal education related to field. Multiple implications for practice beyond the initial findings as to what is deemed important by mid-level managers were derived from this research study and will be discussed in this chapter.

Professional Development Is Valued by Mid-Level Managers

Data collected demonstrate mid-level managers value professional development. Of the survey respondents, 87% felt it was either very important or somewhat important to develop an intentional professional development plan. The mean score of internal professional development was 3.9 and the mean score of external professional development was 3.6. Scores were based on a 5-point Likert scale with 5 being *very important* and 0 being *not at all important*. Interviewees noted many benefits of participation in professional development and spoke highly of their positive experiences.

Due to the high value placed on professional development by student affairs mid-level managers, it is important chief student affairs officers (CSAOs) support and encourage participation both internally and externally. Effective professional development can be achieved without using an abundance of human or financial resources. As budgets tighten, college leadership may find it challenging to advocate spending dollars on professional development, but many professional development opportunities, especially internal, have minimal costs and can be quickly integrated into college operations. College leadership must prioritize professional development for

emerging leaders to expand their knowledge, skills, and abilities which will enhance the overall quality of services provided to students. Based on the research results, mid-level managers are likely to engage and appreciate the emphasis on building competencies to improve practices.

Professional Relationships Are Valued by Mid-Level Managers

A prominent theme throughout both phases of the research study was the value placed on professional relationships with colleagues within and outside the institution. Connecting with other higher education colleagues was the primary reason mid-level managers found value in activities such as attending professional association conferences, in-person workshops, and mentoring. Therefore, college leaders need to create environments that support and encourage collegial and external relationships.

Two more of the most valued professional development activities were receiving and/or providing *informal* mentoring. It is important to note providing and/or receiving *formal* mentoring was not valued nearly as much and, in fact, were grouped in with the least valued activities. Gibson et al. (2000) describe the difference between informal and formal mentoring. Informal mentoring is relationship-based and there is likely a pre-established comfort with one another. The mentorship relationship adapts to the situation and the needs of the parties. Formal mentoring is usually organized through the institution with a specific set of goals pre-determined at the start of the process.

Mid-level managers found the mentoring relationship to be important for multiple reasons; idea-sharing and constructive professional feedback were two prominent aspects of informal mentorship relationships. A valuable mentorship

relationship stemmed from the ability to dialogue openly and learn from one another. Interviewees noted informal mentorship relationships did not need to occur between entry/mid-level/senior staff members, nor within the same division or even institution. Informal mentoring relationships are beneficial no matter the title. Since informal mentorship is based on the notion of professionals having pre-existing relationships, an implication for practice is for college leadership to identify opportunities for colleagues to join together at various functions around the campus so informal mentorships can be developed organically. Another implication for practice is for chief student affairs officers to prioritize informally mentoring staff members themselves and build a culture where informal mentorship is frequent between staff of all levels.

Attending a professional association convention was the most important professional development option of the entire study and attending an in-person workshop was close behind. Mid-level managers overwhelmingly responded the value in these activities stem from the abundance of information gained both from the presenters and attendees. Mid-level managers appreciate sharing ideas, learning of best practices, receiving advice and feedback on issues, and feeling supported by others with the challenges they face. An implication for practice is for chief student affairs officers to encourage involvement in professional associations and networking with colleagues outside of the institution so the mid-level manager has ample opportunity to build professional relationships.

When interviewees were asked their most meaningful professional development experience, all responses highlighted a time participants were deeply engaged with

other professionals. Networking and dialoguing with others were highly valued and the common thread of meaningful professional development. Participants enjoyed sharing best practices and empathizing with others as to the challenges faced at their institutions. It is recommended mid-level managers create informal opportunities to connect with their peers on a regular basis and not wait for an organized professional development activity.

Second Research Question: Conclusions and Implications for Practice

Skill-Building Is Valued by Mid-Level Managers

The second research question examined the factors associated with the selection of professional development. Skill-building, followed by networking, were the two most important factors for mid-level managers when deciding upon professional development. This is not surprising since the most valuable aspects of participating in professional development were the professional relationships built and the knowledge shared between colleagues. Mid-level managers appreciated expanding their skillset to improve departmental services, enhance the student experience, and for their own professional growth. An implication for practice is for chief student affairs officers (CSAOs) to encourage and support development opportunities for mid-level managers which contain strong content and high interaction between professionals. An example of this practice (which also incorporates a valued professional development activity) is when the CSAO actively coaches the mid-level manager on preparing and writing a performance review for a staff member.

There was a significant correlation between the geographic location of the professional development activity and institution size. Professionals at smaller institutions found geographic location a more important selection factor. This may be in part due to budget issues since costs tend to increase as travel lengthens. An implication for practice may be for professionals at smaller institutions to develop relationships with professionals at neighboring institutions. By connecting with these colleagues, mid-level professionals are still able to gain the benefits of professional development so highly valued, such as idea-sharing and collegial support, without having to travel long distances.

Third Research Question: Conclusions and Implications for Practice

Time and College Funding Are Valued by Mid-Level Managers

The third research question identified barriers which exist for mid-level managers in regard to professional development. Participants could select all answer choices that were applicable to them. Limited time for professional development was the largest barrier with 70.8% of respondents selecting this as a hindrance. Interviewees noted the inherent challenge of spending time on themselves for professional development when they already need more time in the day to complete job responsibilities. An implication for practice is for chief student affairs officers to coordinate and/or encourage professional development opportunities that are not taking extensive time away from the office. Many internal and external professional development activities are time-sensitive.

Lack of funding was the second ranked barrier with 66.7% of survey completers identifying this as an issue. In conversations about funding professional development one interviewee, Rey, found lack of funding to be a significant barrier, yet with other interviewees, funding was a barrier in the sense that they had a budget to abide by, but there were adequate funds to allow for sufficient professional development. Interviewees agreed with diminishing institutional funds, travel budgets were decreasing and the ability to participate in conferences, which was the most valued external professional development option, were lessening.

General Conclusions and Implications for Practice

Chief Student Affairs Officers' Role in Professional Development

Interviews revealed mid-level managers felt supported by their supervisor to participate in professional development. In each interview the participant stated they had full control over their participation (or lack thereof) in internal and external professional development. Supervisor involvement was merely the required signature for approval. A suggested practice is for chief student affairs officers (CSAOs) to play an active role in guiding mid-level managers' participation in professional development whether it be to expand a skillset or improve a deficiency. With the CSAO being more closely connected with this process, it creates an opportunity for the mid-level manager and CSAO to have an intentional professional development plan aimed to expand knowledge and skills. This intentionality and professional development partnership can be established and reinforced through the employee review process.

BRIDGING VALUES WITH ACTIVITIES

Five themes were revealed which span the entire study. Mid-level managers value (1) involvement in professional development, (2) professional relationships, (3) skill-building, (4) efficient use of time, and (5) college funding. An implication for practice is for chief student affairs officers (CSAOs) to incorporate these values when organizing professional development for mid-level managers. Integrating multiple values into professional development activities will lead to a more effective and enjoyable experience. For example, mid-level managers ranked reading a professional journal article related to student affairs and reading a book related to student affairs as two of the most valued activities. Interviewees remarked readings did not necessarily have to be on student affairs in order to be valuable and could cover topics including leadership, management, and higher education. Colleges can begin to implement low-cost professional development exercises such as a reading group to provide mid-level managers the opportunity to expand their knowledge through scholarly articles and books, while also incorporating critical thinking and discussion. This example incorporates the identified values of mid-level managers.

Another example integrating mid-level manager values is coordinating a group viewing and discussion of a webinar. While the webinar alone is cost-effective, time-friendly, and high skill-building, adding the component of a group viewing and discussion with colleagues builds professional relationship.

RELATIONSHIP TO LITERATURE

The results of this study echo previous studies which found professional development is valued by student affairs members (Diaz, 2013; Fey & Carpenter, 1996; Janosik et al., 2006; Kane, 1982; Roberts, 2007). J. E. Scott (2000) urged mid-level managers enroll in graduate-level courses and keep current with professional readings and literature, both of which were found to be important to mid-level managers in this study. This research strongly supports the study outcomes of Roberts (2007), Kane (1982), and Fey and Carpenter (1996), which determined discussions with colleagues, mentors, and professional conferences were most effective and preferred professional development methods for mid-level managers to gain competencies.

Diaz's (2013) study suggested chief student affairs officers (CSAOs) were supportive of the pursuit of professional development by mid-level managers, especially those that were cost-effective and did not require much time away from work. These conclusions rang true in this study. However, the Diaz study stated CSAOs were "intentional in their selection of middle managers' professional development practices" (p. 152), whereas interviewed participants stated their supervisors were generally hands-off when it came to professional development practices.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

This study focused on the professional development practices, barriers, and selection factors for community college student affairs mid-level managers. Diaz (2013) studied chief student affairs officers' (CSAOs') perceptions of core competencies and

professional development needs of mid-level managers. This research replicated the professional development portion of the Diaz study and did not include the core competencies component. A recommendation for further study is to replicate the other half of Diaz's study, which focused on core competencies for mid-level managers, but using mid-level managers as the study population instead of CSAOs.

As the role of mid-level managers become increasingly important, ascertaining competencies become even more critical. NASPA and ACPA, two national organizations devoted to the advancement of student affairs, jointly published a set of competencies for foundational, intermediate, or advanced professionals. These competencies were discussed in the literature review of Chapter Two. It is recommended to study the value mid-level managers place on competencies and furthermore, to identify which professional development preferences are most effective for obtaining competencies.

Colleges will benefit from replicating this study with front-line employees. Front-line staff includes positions such as receptionists, who are usually gate-keepers into an office and have high student contact. Front-line employees are generally the first point of contact for students, which is a highly important role within an institution, yet due to the nature of their job responsibilities, their hiring requirements usually entail minimal education and likely no higher education training. The importance of their role, coupled with their marginal pertinent hiring experience validates their need for professional development.

Unfortunately, front-line staff do not have flexibility to be away from their desks for extended periods of time because of departmental staffing needs. Due to the

challenge of leaving their desk, most professional development opportunities for front-line employees are internal. This study determined mid-level managers deemed internal professional development as highly valuable; front-line staff may benefit from these activities if given the opportunity to participate. Therefore, studying the professional development preferences of front-line staff is highly suggested.

Studying student affairs mid-level managers at four-year institutions is another recommendation. Four-year institutions would gain the same benefits as community colleges from learning preferences for professional development preferences. It would also be interesting to compare the results and identify similarities and differences between community college and four-year mid-level managers' perceptions of professional development.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Multiple limitations impact the generalizability of the findings of this study to the entire population community college student affairs mid-level managers. First, the study population targeted only Illinois community colleges. While Illinois has a robust community college system, it is not a diverse enough population to use to represent all community college student affairs mid-level managers. Secondly, although there was not a known number of student affairs mid-level managers in the state, only 48 participants completed the survey and 6 were interviewed. These numbers are not large enough for the researcher to feel confident to be able to generalize findings to the entire population. Lastly, the researcher was at the time of the study a community

college student affairs professional who faced many of the same constraints as a mid-level manager according to the study definition. This personal experience and potential bias may have inadvertently impacted the study.

SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

Data from the research study concluded the most important internal professional development activities were participation at in-service staff development programs or courses, completion of formal, written performance review for others, receipt of informal mentoring/coaching from senior staff member, participation in special institutional task forces, committees and/or commissions, and, lastly, providing informal mentoring/coaching for others. The most important types of external professional development were attendance at a professional association convention, read a professional journal article directly related to student affairs, attended an in-person specialized workshop or seminar, attended an online specialized workshop or seminar, read a book directly related to student affairs, and completion of formal education related to field. Five themes were identified when analyzing the data across the three research questions. Mid-level managers value (1) professional development, (2) professional relationships, (3) skill-building, (4) efficient use of time, and (5) college funding.

Implications for practice, specifically for chief student affairs officers, were identified throughout this chapter and are highlighted below:

- Support mid-level manager participation in internal and external professional development with priority towards those deemed of highest value to mid-level managers;
- Support college-wide and external relationships for mid-level managers;
- Prioritize informally mentoring mid-level managers and build a culture where informal mentorship is frequent between staff of all levels;
- Support involvement in professional associations and networking with colleagues outside of the institution;
- Support development opportunities for mid-level managers which contain strong content and high interaction between professionals ;
- Support professional development opportunities that do not take extensive time away from the office;
- Play an active role in guiding mid-level managers' participation in professional development;
- Incorporate the identified themes/values when organizing professional development for mid-level managers;

Mid-level managers act in a vital role developing and executing college

initiatives. Participation in professional development provides mid-level managers with opportunities to gain the necessary knowledge and skills to be successful in their roles and further the mission of the college.

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APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL LETTER

FERRIS STATE UNIVERSITY

Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects in Research

Office of Academic Research, 220 Ferris Drive, PHR 308 · Big Rapids, MI 49307

Date: October 1, 2015

To: Dr. Susanne Fenske, Ms. Talia Koronkiewicz and Dr. Sandy Balkema

From: Dr. Gregory Wellman, IRB Chair

Re: IRB Application #150813 (*The Professional Development Needs of Community College Student Affairs Mid-Level Managers*)

The Ferris State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application for using human subjects in the study, "*The Professional Development Needs of Community College Student Affairs Mid-Level Managers*" (#150813) and determined that it meets Federal Regulations Expedited-category 2G/2F. This approval has an expiration of one year from the date of this letter. **As such, you may collect data according to the procedures outlined in your application until October 1, 2016.** Should additional time be needed to conduct your approved study, a request for extension must be submitted to the IRB a month prior to its expiration.

Your protocol has been assigned project number (#150813), which you should refer to in future correspondence involving this same research procedure. Approval mandates that you follow all University policy and procedures, in addition to applicable governmental regulations. Approval applies only to the activities described in the protocol submission; should revisions need to be made, all materials must be approved by the IRB prior to initiation. In addition, the IRB must be made aware of any serious and unexpected and/or unanticipated adverse events as well as complaints and non-compliance issues.

Understand that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the study and participant rights with assurance of participant understanding, followed by a signed consent form (signature documentation waived for Phase 1, but required for Phase 2 portion of the study). Informed consent must continue throughout the study via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require each participant receive a copy of the signed consent document and investigators maintain consent records for a minimum of three years.

As mandated by Title 45 Code of Federal Regulations, Part 46 (45 CFR 46) the IRB requires submission of annual reviews during the life of the research project and a Final Report Form upon study completion. Thank you for your compliance with these guidelines and best wishes for a successful research endeavor. Please let us know if the IRB can be of any future assistance.

Regards,



Ferris State University Institutional Review Board
Office of Academic Research, Academic Affairs

Version 1.2015

APPENDIX B: PERMISSION TO REPRINT INSTRUMENTS

PERMISSION: TO USE EXISTING SURVEY AND INTERVIEW INSTRUMENTS

September 16, 2016

Dear Dr. Diaz,

I am a doctoral student at Ferris State University in the Doctorate in Community College Leadership program. My dissertation is titled "Professional Development Preferences of Community College Student Affairs Mid-Level Managers" chaired by Dr. Susanne Fenske. On May 12, 2015 you gave me permission to modify your research instruments for my study. I am now requesting permission to print these adapted survey and interview instruments in my dissertation appendix. The instruments are cited appropriately throughout the study.

If you are agreeable to these terms, please sign and return this form to me via email at tkoronk@gmail.com at your convenience.

Thank you,

Talia Koronkiewicz

Doctoral Candidate, Ferris State University, Doctorate in Community College Leadership



Dr. Amy Diaz, Signature



Date

APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT AND SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

PROJECT TITLE: The Professional Development Preferences of Student Affairs Mid-Level Managers in Illinois Community Colleges

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Talia Koronkiewicz, Ferris State University Doctoral Candidate

EMAIL: koronkt@ferris.edu **PHONE:** 815-953-2757

FACULTY ADVISOR: Dr. Susanne Fenske, Clarion University

EMAIL: dr.susanne.fenske@gmail.com

You are invited to participate in this research project conducted by Talia L. Koronkiewicz, a student in the Ferris State University Doctorate in Community College Leadership Program. The purpose of this survey is to identify the professional development needs of community college student affairs mid-level managers. This study will explore:

- What types of professional development do community college student affairs mid-level managers value as important and effective for positional success?
- What factors are associated with the selection of professional development?
- What are the barriers associated with professional development?

This 15 question survey is anonymous and is anticipated to take you approximately 15 minutes. The survey must be completed in one sitting, as there is not an option to save responses without formal submission.

Identifying professional development needs is an excellent self-reflection exercise for a mid-level manager. Involvement in the study will assist you in developing personal awareness regarding ascertaining competencies and pursuing professional development opportunities that will positively impact professional effectiveness. Furthermore, results of this study will aid community college leaders to better understand and support student affairs mid-level managers.

Informed Consent: Risks and Voluntary Nature of the Study

You are being asked to participate in a study to identify the professional development needs of community college student affairs mid-level managers. The researcher anticipates minimal risk through participation in this study and your participation is strictly voluntary. You may terminate your participation in this study at any time by exiting the survey. You may select not to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer. The survey data will be collected confidentially and reported in aggregate form to protect participant identifiers.

By selecting the web link provided, you consent to participate in this research study and will be taken to the survey questions. Please print this page if you wish to retain a copy of this consent for your records.

Contacts and Questions:

If you have questions about this study, please contact the Faculty Advisor, Dr. Susanne Fenske, listed above. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, contact the Ferris State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Human Participants at: 1201 S. State St. - CSS 310, Big Rapids, MI 49307 (231) 591-2553 or IRB@ferris.edu.

Thank you in advance for your participation in this study.

Best,

Talia Koronkiewicz

Doctoral Student, Ferris State University Doctorate in Community College Leadership program
Manager of Student Conduct and Campus Life, McHenry County College

SURVEY QUESTIONS

Thank you for participating in this survey.

For the purposes of this study, a middle manager is defined as a student affairs professional who has programmatic or departmental responsibility and reports directly to the Chief Student Services Officer (Diaz, 2013).

- **According to the definition above, are you classified as a mid-level manager in student affairs at an Illinois community college?**

Yes

No

If you do not meet the study definition, please exit the survey at this time. Thank you for your interest in the research study.

- **How many years have you been a mid-level manager in an Illinois community college Student Services division?**
 1. < 1 year
 2. 1-5 years
 3. 6-10 years
 4. 11 – 15 years
 5. >16 years
- **Please mark any internal professional development activities you have participated in within the past twelve months.** Internal refers to activities coordinated within your institution. *Please check all that apply.*

Completed formal, written performance review for others	
Provided purposeful career counseling (or, career review to plan ways to acquire additional skills, education, and training) for others	
Participated in in-service staff development programs or courses	
Provided in-service staff development programs for others	
Taken on a temporary task or job rotation	
Received formal mentoring/coaching from senior staff member	
Received informal mentoring/coaching from senior staff member	
Provided formal mentoring/coaching for others	
Provided informal mentoring/coaching for others	
Participated in special institutional task forces, committees, and/or commissions	
Taken on additional responsibilities above and beyond specific job description	
Applied for a sabbatical or study leave	
None of the above	
Other: _____	

Source: Diaz (2013). Adapted and used with permission.

- **How important is it for you to participate in these internal professional development activities?** For each item, select either *Not at all important*, *Not Very Important*, *Neutral*, *Somewhat important*, or *Very important*

Professional Development Activity	Not at all Important	Not Very Important	Neutral	Somewhat Important	Very Important
Completed formal, written performance review for others					
Provided purposeful career counseling (or, career review to plan ways to acquire additional skills, education, and training) for others					
Participated in in-service staff development programs or courses					
Provided in-service staff development programs for others					
Taken on a temporary task or job rotation					
Received formal mentoring/coaching from senior staff member					
Received informal mentoring/coaching from senior staff member					
Provided formal mentoring/coaching for others					
Provided informal mentoring/coaching for others					
Participated in special institutional task forces, committees, and/or commissions					
Taken on additional responsibilities above and beyond specific job description					

Applied for a sabbatical or study leave					
Other: _____					

Source: Diaz (2013). Adapted and used with permission.

- **Please list and describe any other internal professional development you think is very important.**

- **Please mark any external professional development activities you have participated in within the past twelve months.** External refers to activities not coordinated by your institution (may be sponsored by the institution). *Please check all that apply.*

Read a professional journal article directly related to student affairs	
Read a book directly related to student affairs	
Completed formal education related to field (e.g., coursework)	
Attended an in-person specialized workshop or seminar	
Attended an online specialized workshop or seminar (e.g., webinar)	
Attended a professional association convention	
Made a presentation at conference	
Attended a higher education management institute	
Participated in a national fellowship or leadership program	
Performed independent research on a topic	
Authored/coauthored a manuscript for publication	

Performed as an external consultant	
Served on board of directors for a state or regional organization	
Served on board of directors for a national organization	
None of the above	
Other: _____	

Source: Diaz (2013). Adapted and used with permission.

- **How important is it to participate in the following external professional development activities?** For each activity, please select either: Very Important, Somewhat Important, Neutral, Not Very Important, Not at all Important

Professional Development Activity	Not at all Important	Not Very Important	Neutral	Somewhat Important	Very Important
Read a professional journal article directly related to student affairs					
Read a book directly related to student affairs					
Completed formal education related to field (e.g., coursework)					
Attended a specialized workshop or seminar					
Attended a professional association convention Made a presentation at conference					
Attended a higher education management institute					

Participated in a national fellowship or leadership program					
Performed independent research on a topic					
Authored/coauthored a manuscript for publication					
Performed as an external consultant					
Served on board of directors for a state or regional organization					
Served on board of directors for a national organization					
None of the above					
Other: _____					

Source: Diaz (2013). Adapted and used with permission.

- Please list and describe any other external professional development you think is very important.

- **How important are the factors below when selecting professional development activities?** For each factor, please select either: Very Important, Somewhat Important, Neutral, Not Very Important, Not at all Important

Factor	Not at all Important	Not Very Important	Neutral	Somewhat Important	Very Important
Skill Building					
Networking					
Career Advancement					
Institutional Expectation					
Personal Reflection/Wellness					
Geographic Location					
Sponsoring Organization					
Other: Please list					

- **Which barriers to professional development, if any, are applicable to you?**
Check all that apply.

Limited time for professional development	
Lack of appropriate degree or educational credential	
Limited organizational support for professional development activities	
Lack of similar needs among middle managers	
Lack of opportunity to take on leadership roles	
Limited opportunities for middle management dialogue and reflection	
Lack of mentoring/networking opportunities	
Lack of funding available for participation in such activities	
No barriers	
List others: _____	

Source: Diaz (2013). Adapted and used with permission.

- **How important is it to intentionally design a personal professional development plan?**

Please select, Very Important, Somewhat Important, Neutral, Not Very Important, Not at all Important

Demographic information

For assistance with the following demographic questions, visit:

http://classifications.carnegiefoundation.org/lookup_listings/institution.php

Size of your community college (based on annual Full Time Equivalency) – please select one

<1,000 – 5,000 students

5,001 – 10,000

10,001 – 15,000

15,001 – 20,000

20,001 – 25,000

>25,000

Location of your institution (according to the Carnegie classification) – please select one

Urban

Suburban

Rural

Indicate functional areas you supervise. Assign 1 for most time consuming, 2 for second most time consuming, and 3 for third most time consuming responsibility and so forth. (Only rank the top 5 most time consuming functional areas you supervise or less if you oversee less than 5 functional areas.)

Academic Support/Tutoring	
Academic Advising/Transfer	
Accessibility and Disability Services	
Admissions/Recruitment	
Articulation	
Athletics/Intramurals	
Assessment and Placement	
Career	
Childcare	
Counseling	
Developmental Education	
Financial Aid	
First Year Experience	
Health and Wellness	
Housing and Residence Life	
Library	
Multicultural Affairs	
Orientation	
Records/Evaluation	
Registration	
Service-Learning/Volunteerism	
Student Activities	
Student Conduct/Judicial	
Student Success and Retention	
Veterans	
Other:	

What is your highest educational level completed?

- Associate's Degree
- Bachelor's Degree
- Master's Degree
- Doctorate Degree
- Other: _____

The next phase of this study includes 90 minute face-to-face interviews with middle managers to learn more about the selection of professional development activities and

perceived effectiveness of professional development activities for mid-level managers. Interviews will be held at the college of the participant or a mutually agreed upon location at a date/time that is acceptable to the volunteer and researcher -- ideally within the next 4 weeks.

If you are interested in participating in the face-to-face interview, please select the link below. You will enter your name and contact information in a separate webpage not connected to this survey. Within two weeks of this survey closure, selected mid-level managers will be contacted to coordinate the face-to-face interviews. Please contact the researcher at koronkt@ferris.edu you have questions regarding participation in this research.

This completes the survey. Thank you for your participation.

Screen One of Face-to-Face Interview Questionnaire

Thank you for volunteering to participate in a one-on-one interview with the researcher to learn more about the professional development needs of student affairs mid-level managers in Illinois community colleges. To ensure a broad representation of student affairs middle management, please answer the following demographic questions.

Within two weeks of this survey closure, selected mid-level managers will be contacted to coordinate the face-to-face interviews. All volunteers will be contacted within one month of survey closure. Please contact the researcher at koronkt@ferris.edu if you have questions regarding participation in this research.

Demographic Information

Name

Institution

Title

Email

Phone

Explain Your Higher Education Experience

Years in higher education?

Years in student affairs?

Years in community colleges?

Years as a middle manager according to the definition of this study?

Highest degree earned?

Comments:

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

“Thank you for volunteering to participate in this phase of this study identifying the professional development needs of community college student affairs mid-level managers. The questions asked today are a combination of original questions and an adaption of questions asked to Illinois community college chief student services officers conducted by Dr. Amy Diaz regarding their perceptions and attitudes of mid-level manager competencies and professional development. My research will directly further Dr. Diaz’s study and also expand upon the minimal field research.

The interview includes twelve (12) structured questions with additional follow up questions to be used as necessary. The interview is expected to last approximately 90 minutes. I will take notes throughout the interview, as well as audio record the interview for later use in data analysis. To protect your identity, your name and institution will not be used in my research. Instead, I will use pseudonyms to describe participants and their institutions. In most cases, information will be shared in aggregate form. Remember, this is completely voluntary and you can elect not to answer any question asked. Please feel free to ask any questions of me during this time as well. Are you agreeable to beginning the interview?”

I have provided you a list of both professional development activities taken from original survey so you may refer to these as we begin our discussion today.

Professional Development – General Questions

Adapted and used with permission (Diaz, 2013)

1) Define and describe professional development?

a. Probe: What are your ideas about the role or importance of professional development?

2) More specifically, then, what is the purpose of professional development for yourself as a middle manager?

Probes:

a. How do you determine your goals/objectives/expectations for professional development?

b. How is professional development used to enrich and advance your learning or to remediate deficiencies in knowledge and skills?

3) To what extent are you responsible for selecting your own professional development?

[Probe: Very much – somewhat – not at all]

a. To what extent do you believe your individual attributes (motivation, skills, abilities, experience) impact your opportunities to participate in professional development?

b. Explain the institutional process you must complete for approval of professional development?

c. Elaborate on the level of support you receive by your supervisor for professional development?

4) What factors contribute to your selection of professional development activities?
(Reference list from survey)

Probe:

- a. Skill-Building?
- b. Networking?
- c. Cost?
- d. Duration?
- e. Location?
- f. Topic?
- g. Institutional Support?
- h. Learning Outcomes?
- i. Resume-Builder?
- j. Delivery Type?
- k. Career Advancement?
- l. Other: Please list

5) What benefit(s) do you expect to gain from professional development?

Probes:

- a. Are those benefits generally met? How do you know?
- b. Who else benefits from your participation in professional development? In what ways?

6) What are the most effective forms of professional development for yourself as a middle manager? (Reference list)

Probes:

- a. How do you know that professional development has been effective for you?
- b. What criteria do you use to determine effectiveness (e.g., unit cost, behavior change, improved outcomes)?
- c. What kinds of learning outcomes do you look for, if any?
 - i. Why these? How do you know these are important outcomes?
- d. To what extent do you believe professional development activities are enduring?

7) Briefly describe the most meaningful professional development activity in which you have participated in as a middle manager?

Probes:

- a. Why?
- b. How did how did you apply these concepts in your position?

8) I am going to list the top five selected options of *external* professional development that were rated as most important to middle managers based on the original survey. Please share what benefits, if any, you have gained from each activity.

Probes:

- a. Professional Development: Attended a professional association convention
- b. Professional Development: Read a professional journal article directly related to student affairs
- c. Professional Development: Attended an in-person specialized workshop or seminar

- d. Professional Development: Attended an online specialized workshop or seminar (e.g., webinar)
- e. Professional Development: Read a book directly related to student affairs
- f. To what extent do you believe the activity is an effective professional development activity? How do you know?
- g. Which among these approaches to professional development do you consider to be most important? Why?

9) I am going to list the top five selected options of *internal* professional development that were rated as most important to middle managers based on the original survey. Please share what benefits, if any, you have gained from each.

Probes:

- a. Professional Development: Participated in in-service staff development programs or courses
- b. Professional Development: Completed formal, written performance review for others
- c. Professional Development: Received informal mentoring/coaching from senior staff member
- d. Professional Development: Participated in special institutional task forces, committees, and or commissions
- e. Professional Development: Provided informal mentoring/coaching for others
- f. To what extent do you believe the professional development was effective? How do you know?
- g. Which among these approaches to professional development do you consider to be most important? Why?

10) Based on the list of internal and external professional development provided, which category, internal or external, do you believe is most valuable to you as a mid-level manager?

Probes:

- a. Explain your rationale.

11) What barriers/challenges exist that impact your professional development?
(Reference list from survey)

Probes:

- a. Institutional barriers?
- b. External barriers?
- c. Personal barriers?
- d. How do you overcome those barriers/challenges?

Concluding Questions

12) Please add anything else that informs this study but may have not been asked in a previous question.

“Thank you for your participation in this study. Within the next few weeks, I will contact you and ask that you review my summary document (i.e., notes) from this interview to ensure accuracy and validity of content. As I begin to complete this work, I may need to contact you via phone to ask for clarification or for additional explanation on a particular idea or issue. Are you willing to participate in one final telephone call, if needed? Do you have any questions of me at this time? Thank you again for your participation in this dissertation study