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STUDENT AFFAIRS SUPERVISOR TRAINING, PREPARATION, AND PERCEPTION OF JOB SATISFACTION

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STUDENT AFFAIRS SUPERVISOR TRAINING, PREPARATION,

AND PERCEPTION OF JOB SATISFACTION

by

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ABSTRACT

Student affairs professionals are critical to the overall success of institutions of higher learning. Currently, the profession is at a turning point in navigating many complex issues. One of these issues is ensuring adequate levels of job satisfaction and employee morale. Units who employ supervisors who are competent leaders can see increased employee satisfaction and morale when training appropriately to handle the complexities of supervising others. When supervisors are ill-equipped to manage, employees report increased issues in the workplace. The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of student affairs supervisors related to their preparation and training. Specifically, this research explored the depth and types of training student affairs supervisors receive. Additionally, this study assessed the impact of those experiences on supervisor job satisfaction and performance. Key results from a national sample of student affairs supervisors (n=155) indicated strong levels of agreement that training received related to management and supervisor of personnel contributed to their overall success as a supervisor. Of note, however, was that many participants (57.42%) denoted their training was only five hours or less of their time and 8% of participants reported never receiving any additional trainings around supervision and management of personnel. Ensuring the quality and preparedness of all student affairs professionals is extremely important for higher education especially in navigating institutions in a post-Covid-19 environment. This study sheds light on the need for sound initial and ongoing preparation and training for student affairs supervisors.

Keywords: student affairs, supervision, personnel, management, training

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I want to acknowledge those who supported and encouraged me in both beginning this journey to go back to school to obtain my doctorate and those who were there when it was hard to keep going on. Zachary Turner was one of the first to encourage me to go back to school. Because of his belief in me, I applied to the program. I could not have made it through this journey without my colleague, classmate, and friend, Christy Kayser Arrazattee. Her support and humor carried me through most semesters.

It is my hope that this research contributes to the field of higher education in a productive way. Having worked in the field for fifteen years, I selected this topic because I see student affairs supervisors training and preparation as a timely and relevant issue.

"At the end of the day, at the end of the week, at the end of my life, I want to be able to say that I contributed more than I criticized." – Brené Brown

DEDICATION

I would not have been able to stay committed on this journey without the steadfast support of my partner, Dale. Not once did he complain or stop believing in me. His patience and encouragement are something I will always treasure. I also dedicate this to my children: Eli and Lucy. May you always remember you can achieve whatever goals you set your mind to if you have the support and encouragement of those who love you.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ACPA   American College Personnel Association

CAS   Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education

IRB   Institutional Review Board

NASPA   Student Affairs Administration in Higher Education

SACSA   Southern Association for College Student Affairs

CHAPTER I – INTRODUCTION

In institutions of higher learning across the country, student affairs professionals are seen as critical support staff assisting academics in providing a robust and holistic experience for students. Student affairs professionals create and develop opportunities for students to succeed outside of the classroom that complements what they are learning inside the classroom. These professionals often work alongside one another to impact student retention and progression. Their work is a necessary component in any thriving institution. As student affairs professionals advance in the field, they take on supervisory roles as well, overseeing other personnel. While supervision can be seen as a managerial task, student affairs supervisors face complex and multifaceted issues surrounding the management of personnel. How well one supervises others can be indicative of a thriving unit. Adversely, when there are challenges the supervisor cannot or does not address appropriately, conflict and tension in the workplace may grow. Such instances can create barriers to overall success that may hinder the operations of entire units. Providing proper and ongoing training to student affairs supervisors can alleviate this challenge and help units sustain a thriving workplace environment.

Background

Postsecondary education institutions employ many people. In addition to faculty, support staff and administrative positions are often labeled as student affairs professionals. These student affairs professionals are critical to the overall success of institutions of higher learning. Student affairs has long been seen as a helping profession; its very foundations are dating back centuries in America and the beginning concepts of in loco parentis (Henning, 2007). For decades, dedicated student affairs professionals have committed their careers to service to institutions and to student success in a variety of capacities. Through the years, institutions have seen rapid

growth in student affairs related functional units in attempts to increase student retention and progression. This rapid growth has contributed greatly to the overall success of institutions. A robust student affairs division can aid institutions in the overall success of students' retention, persistence, and graduation.

Despite rapid growth and outcomes attached to student success, internally student affairs units face growing pressures related to funding decreases, employee work-life balance, and morale. The economic crisis of 2008 saw dramatic decreases to the funding models of most institutions across the country (Geiger, 2010). These funding issues brought on disturbing trends in higher education of academic program cuts, forced early retirements and catastrophic financial reductions to student affairs (Geiger, 2010). When the Covid-19 pandemic occurred, many industries in America were able to shift to remote work quickly. The field of higher education, however, did not transition so easily (Blankenburger & Williams, 2020). Barriers to course delivery were more obvious but shifting student affairs and student services related units to a remote or virtual world proved more difficult (Blankenburger & Williams, 2020).

Presently, the profession of student affairs is at a turning point in navigating many complex issues. One issue related to employee satisfaction and increased morale critical to a successful student affairs division is related to supervision. Units with leaders who employ appropriate supervision strategies could see more success than units that struggle with ineffective supervisors. One way to ensure supervisors are equipped to handle the challenges and complexities surrounding supervision is to provide appropriate supervisor training in student affairs units. When doing so, institutions will potentially see the results in functioning units with satisfactory morale and production. It is important in an organization to recruit, retain, and develop staff who can work towards the mission and vision of the organization (Council for the

Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, 2019). Understanding the ways in which supervisors are trained to identify gaps in knowledge or skills is aimed to equip institutions to preserve their workforce and reap additional benefits that will have lasting impacts for years to come.

Statement of Problem

Employee engagement in the workplace is a critical part of retaining quality employees (Seppala & Moeller, 2018). Employee engagement and satisfaction is a large component in the ability for higher education institutions to attract and retain motivated employees (Hirt, 2006). When employees do not feel their supervisors understand their needs or are ill equipped to manage, they express dissatisfaction in the workplace and propensity to leave (Holmes, 2014).

Research shows low morale and high turnover end up costing institutions more money in the long run (Mather et al., 2009). Because of these reasons, it is incredibly important for student affairs supervisors to be competent leaders. Scholarship further highlights a lack of time or priority placed on supervisor training because employees in the field are so tied down with other, more pressing priorities (Alvim & Barnett, 2017). Should they lack necessary training and skills to be successful, institutions should be hard pressed to put time and resources into a comprehensive training and preparation program to help supervisors. This approach could lead to a more engaged workplace which can have vastly improved outcomes for productivity, job satisfaction, and morale of its employees. As higher education reaches a turning point in the 21st century, it is imperative that institutions of higher learning assess personnel and programs equipped to assist them in excelling in their role. This research documents the types of training and preparation student affairs supervisors received and highlights their perceptions of that training on job performance and satisfaction.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of a national sample of student affairs supervisors related to their preparation and training. Specifically, this research explored the depth and types of training student affairs supervisors receive. Additionally, this study assessed the impact of those experiences on supervisor job satisfaction and performance.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do student affairs supervisors describe the preparation they received related to management and supervision of staff?

2. How do student affairs supervisors describe the relationship between the preparation they received and their job performance and satisfaction?

CHAPTER II – LITERATURE REVIEW

The exploration of the literature focusing on student affairs supervisor training yields several key concepts worth noting. In that regard, several books have been written on the topics of supervising new professionals (e.g., Janosik et al., 2003), becoming socialized as an administrator in student affairs (e.g., Tull et al., 2009), improving student affairs staffing practices (Winston & Creamer, 1997), and on various models and supervision styles in which leaders can manage others. Additionally, the literature surrounding student affairs employee job satisfaction is also supported by numerous studies surrounding student affairs attrition and turnover in the profession (Lovell & Kosten, 2000). This chapter presents a synthesis of contemporary research in the field with each source highlighting key aspects of student affairs supervision either by examining training type and experience or by exploring the perceptions of supervisors and employees. The scholarship presented in this chapter highlights the trends in the field over past 25 years. Sources are divided into three categories: supervision and staffing practices, training and preparation of supervisors, and supervisor and employee perspectives.

Supervision and Staffing Practices

In their landmark work, *Improving Staffing Practices in Student Affairs*, Winston and Creamer (1997) examined what student affairs staffing practices are and what they should be. Their book inquired into staff recruitment and selection, new position orientation, job satisfaction, supervisory approaches, staff development, and performance appraisals. This prime work was the first in the field to highlight some of the earliest comprehensive approaches to staffing and supervision in student affairs. Through their research, Winston and Creamer (1997) received survey results from 121 institutions representing research universities, liberal arts colleges, and two-year institutions. They specifically asked respondents to answer questions

around how often staff receive supervision, what topics are addressed during supervision, and what kinds of follow-up happens after supervision. Respondents were asked where, if at all, they received training in providing supervision. "Only about one half of the respondents reported that they had ever received formal training in providing supervision" (Winston & Creamer, 1997, p. 111). These findings document an early gap in the importance of supervision but lack of training.

In a meta-analysis of thirty years of research in this field, published a decade later, Lovell and Kosten (2000) investigated the skills and traits needed to be seen as an effective supervisor. The study sought to integrate the existing literature in the field around skills, personal traits, and knowledge to determine what makes a successful student affairs administrator. The synthesis of three decades of research revealed that the skills most studied were "administration and management" at 83% (Lovell & Kosten, 2000). This evidence offered implications for ensuring a strong foundation for student affairs administrations; of which supervision is a crucial piece. Advancing this work further, Shupp and Arminio (2012) examined the role of supervision as an important tool to retaining entry-level student affairs professionals and illustrated their perceptions that many seasoned professionals were ill prepared to serve as supervisors. As illustrated, the research on supervision and staffing practices spanning over several decades remains consistent in the finding that, despite their centrality for the work of student affairs, the ongoing need for such practices has not always been accompanied with their successful implementation.

Training and Preparation of Supervisors

An important component of supervisor training and preparation emerging from literature is the importance of initial training. In that regard, Pace et al. (2019) noted that while there is significant need for assuring new professionals are supervised properly, there is little training

offered to support those that supervise others in student affairs. This recent finding calls for more in-depth analysis of supervisor training with appropriate recommendations for future practice. The authors particularly reflected on previous research in the field around supervision types and its relevance and documented the lack of emphasis in providing a solid model to support both supervisor and supervisee. "Effective supervisors can adapt their supervision skills to attend to both the growth of the supervisee and the achievement of institutional goals" (Pace et al., 2019, p. 4). Their research further indicated that supervisors tended to develop a style based on their own innate personality traits but also from their formal training.

This evidence builds on the work of Carpenter and Stimpson (2007) who explored student affairs professionalism, specifically around staffing and personnel matters. Analyzing the themes surrounding the concept of "professionalism" in the field, they placed an emphasis on the need for continued and ongoing professional development while pointing out that during the 1990s, most professional development began to stall. These findings raise an important question of the ways in which employees may be affected if student affairs supervisors miss opportunities for training and development surrounding supervisor skills. In answering that question, the authors highlighted Lovell and Kosten's (2000) meta-analysis focusing on the skills, traits, and knowledge required of successful student affairs professionals. Authors offered continued reflections from studies stressing the need for more attention on skill development regarding supervision and personnel management in the field. Research found in the literature in this section emphasizes a desire to continue to explore the training and preparation of supervisors in the field of student affairs as evidence points to a lacking in documentation needed to understand this arena more comprehensively.

Supervisor and Employee Perspectives

Literature in this section focuses on supervisor and employee perspectives and the ways in which these perspectives identify the rationale behind the importance of appropriate supervisor training and preparation. In their early work, Fey and Carpenter (1996) explored the opinions of mid-level student affairs administrators on the importance of management skills and their perceived need for ongoing skill development. Interestingly, the authors found that mid-level administrators identified management skills as the most important, yet they felt they did not need any further development in that area. Advancing this line of inquiry, Holmes (2014) explored the idea that being ready to supervise others is a skill that entry-level student affairs professionals need to hone before they can be ready for this role. Of particular interest was the finding that participants stated that if they felt they were not properly trained on supervision, it was because their supervisor was not properly trained either and therefore had no sound skill set to teach others. This critical evidence serves as an important foundation for understanding the need for the current research study and its aim to explore the gaps in supervisors' development of the appropriate supervision skills and their perceptions of an adequate supervisory training. On that note, Lane (2010) explored the struggle of mid-level managers as effective supervisors. Through a synergistic supervision lens, the study examined perceived supervisor support and perceived organization support. The results noted a need for further research into the support of supervisors and in understanding professional development needs of mid-level managers.

Lastly, a national study by Sermersheim and Keim (2005) profiled mid-level student affairs managers to determine the importance they placed on professional development as well as ascertain preferred methods of staff development. Four hundred and fifty randomly selected mid-level managers were participants among colleges and universities who were members of the

American College Personnel Association (ACPA). Among the top-rated skills by participants were personnel management and leadership. Surprisingly, personnel management was one of the lowest identified skills by participants in a question asking them to rank areas they felt they needed continued development at only 42%. Authors also noted the discrepancy in perceived skill importance versus need for continued development as an area of concern. Overall, their findings call on the need to address training in graduate preparation programs and the ongoing need for professional development in their discussion.

Of relevance for this research is also to examine the role supervisors have in student affairs professionals job satisfaction and morale. As this field encounters a fair amount of turnover, some professionals point to supervisor issues as a reason for leaving (Marshall et al., 2016). Institutional fit and supervisor incompatibility cannot be ignored when determining the importance of supervisor training. In that regard, scholarship documents that student affairs professionals leaving the field noted their supervisors not valuing their work or feeling like they were included in decision making (Marshall et al., 2016). Furthermore, "the role of a supervisor is important within any organization and may impact overall satisfaction one has with the workplace" (p. 155). Burnout and employee perceptions among student affairs professionals are increasingly cited reasons for leaving the field (Conner, 2021). Moreover, the evidence exists to support the premise that the longer student affairs leaders worked at an institution, the lower their overall morale was (Rosser & Javinar, 2003).

As presented in this chapter, the literature consistently points to a wide array of challenges resulting from supervisors being ill-equipped to manage others. These challenges, in-turn, were documented to lead to employee dissatisfaction, burnout, and increased turnover. On the other hand, the institutions that properly train their supervisors should feel a level of confidence and

assurance in knowing that, while no workplace is without conflict, their employees are more

likely to be well prepared to handle situations that encounter in their daily operations.

CHAPTER III – METHODS

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of student affairs supervisors related to their preparation and training and to assess what impact those experiences have on their job satisfaction and performance. This objective was accomplished by proposing research questions designed to understand the types of training supervisors received and their perceptions regarding the effectiveness of such experience. Additionally, participants were asked to reflect on how impactful the training was on their overall job confidence and performance. The study consisted of a quantitative survey participants completed online. The research questions for this study were:

1. How do student affairs supervisors describe the preparation they received related to management and supervision of staff?

2. How do student affairs supervisors describe the relationship between the preparation they received and their job performance and satisfaction?

Research Design

This study was designed as quantitative research utilizing an internet-based questionnaire administered through Qualtrics. Qualtrics allows users to create questionnaires, distribute and store the data. The University of Southern Mississippi provides access to Qualtrics for free to students, faculty, and staff.

A two-part questionnaire was developed to address both research questions. The first section introduces questions related to assessing student affairs supervisors training and preparation received. The second set of questions asked participants to reflect on the relationship between the preparation received and their job performance and satisfaction. The survey research design was chosen to capture one-time quantitative data (Ruel et al., 2016). The questionnaire

was distributed to participants by using a convenience sampling method primarily through online student affairs social media groups. Convenience sampling was identified as the preferred method for survey distribution to gather the most easily available participants (Ruel et al., 2016).

Instrument

A questionnaire was the survey instrument used in this study. The questionnaire was developed with all data stored in Qualtrics. The first section of the questionnaire consisted of three screening questions to determine participant eligibility. If participants did not select "yes" to both questions, they would not be eligible to participate. The second section included basic demographic information of participants such as gender, race, type of institution where they are employed, number of staff they supervise, and specific functional area. The third section of the instrument consisted of 16 questions and was designed for participants to reflect on their experiences with the initial training they received regarding supervision and personnel management. The first six questions were developed to solicit the responses to the first research question and asked basic questions to determine the scope and topics related to the training participants received. The remaining 10 questions were developed to answer the second research question and asked participants about their opinions regarding the effectiveness of the received training and its impact on their job performance and satisfaction (Appendix A).

Participants willing to take the questionnaire had access to the online link directing them to Qualtrics for participation. To complete the questionnaire, all participants agreed to an electronic consent form. The standard consent letter included the nature of the study, explained that the participation in the study carried minimal risk to participants, and guaranteed their anonymity

and confidentiality. The consent form also highlighted the purpose of the research and the purpose of the data use. Participants had to be 18 years or older to take part in the research.

Timeline

The survey instrument was developed in the early spring of 2021 and revised throughout the remainder of the semester based on faculty feedback in preparation for submission to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) since the research involved human subjects. The IRB approval was granted on June 4, 2021 (Appendix B). The survey was activated on July 9, 2021, and remained open until September 24, 2021, for a total data collection period of 11 weeks.

Participants and Data Collection

This research was conducted online, and it did not involve any physical location or study sites. Participation for this study was based on the several inclusion criteria. First, participation was open to all student affairs professionals as indicated by the 39 functional areas identified by NASPA (Appendix C). Next, participation was open only to those student affairs professionals who are working full-time at an accredited four-year public or private non-profit institution in the United States. Lastly, participants included only those professionals who supervise at least one other professional staff member (non-student or graduate student).

To yield a sample size as large as possible, several methods to reach possible participants were utilized through convenience sampling. The participants were first recruited through social media posts in student affairs groups on Facebook and LinkedIn (Appendix D). To disseminate the research invitation, a graphic was posted in those online groups (Appendix E). Additionally, members in the Southern Association of College Student Affairs (SACSA) were invited to participate through email on September 7, 2021 (Appendix F).

Those who completed the questionnaire had an opportunity to enter their email address if they wanted to be eligible for a single drawing to receive a $25 Amazon gift card, but this entry was optional. Any email addresses collected for that portion of the questionnaire were stored separately to maintain complete participant confidentiality. The targeted sample size for this study was at least 100 participants. When the survey instrument was closed on September 24, 2021, and incomplete responses were eliminated, the final sample included 155 responses.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. By nature of the two research questions, the researcher sought to use descriptive statistical analysis to help summarize key data points. The analysis was conducted in Qualtrics using descriptive statistics to determine mean, median, and standard deviation values. Basic demographic information was collected and recorded for initial statistical purposes. For the first research question, the researcher examined feedback from participants surrounding the types of preparation received on the topic of management and supervision of personnel. Assessing the data collected for the first research question enabled the researcher to group answers to determine any patterns or similarities among responses. For the second research question, the researcher explored the perceptions participants had regarding the preparation received in relation to their overall job performance and satisfaction. Using descriptive statistics allowed for the data to be assessed to ascertain any commonalities and repetition among these responses.

CHAPTER IV – RESULTS

This chapter presents the findings from the online questionnaire. First, participant demographic information was analyzed and reported. The demographic section of information requested of each participant completing the questionnaire was comprised of seven questions. Next, each research question's findings are reported using descriptive statistics from Qualtrics; the online platform that housed the questionnaire. The first research question documents participant experiences regarding supervisor training and preparation received. The second research question presents findings on participant perceptions on whether their training contributed to overall job satisfaction and performance. Figures and a table are used throughout the chapter to highlight specific findings.

Participant Demographics

The questionnaire closed with 155 completed participant responses. Only compete questionnaires were included in data analysis. To obtain a complete picture of participant makeup and eligibility to participate, the first question after the standard consent question asked participants to indicate that they currently work in student affairs at a four-year, non-profit, public, or private institution in the United States. Participants had to indicate "yes" to continue. Of the 155 responses, 73.55% (n=114) indicated they work at a public institution with 26.45% (n=41) of participants indicated working at a private institution. The next question in this section asked if participants currently supervise at least one other professional staff member (non-student or graduate student). Participants must have indicated "yes" to continue.

The next demographic question asked participants to indicate their gender. Of the 155 responses, 54.19% (n=84) identified as male and 45.81% (n=71) identified as female. Zero participants selected the "non-binary" or "prefer not to say" options. Participants were next asked

to identify their race/ethnicity. Of the 155 responses, 71.61% (n=111) of identified as

White/Caucasian, 16.77% (n=26) as Black/African American, 7.10% (n=11) as American

Indian/Alaskan Native, 3.23% (n=5) as Hispanic/Latino, and 1.29% (n=2) as Asian.

The next section of questions asked participants to indicate how many years they have

been working professionally in the field of student affairs. Of the 155 responses, 38.71% (n=60)

indicated one to five years of experience in the field, 28.39% (n=44) indicated six to ten years in

the field, 17.42% (n=27) indicated over 15 years in the field, and 15.48% (n=24) indicated 11 to

15 years in the field. Additionally, participants were asked to indicate how many years they have

supervised professionals in the field. Responses showed 46.45% (n=72) had one to five years of

supervision experience, 22.58% (n=35) had six to ten years of experience, 12.90% (n=20)

indicated over 15 years of experience, 10.97% (n=17) had 11 to 15 years of experience, and

7.10% (n=11) had less than one year of experience supervising other professional staff.

The next set of demographic questions asked participants specific questions about how

many professionals they supervise and the functional areas in which they work. First,

participants were asked how many professionals they currently supervise. As illustrated in Figure

1, of the 155 responses, 36.13% (n=56) indicated they supervise two to four professionals,

23.87% (n=37) supervise five to seven professionals, 20.65% (n=32) supervise eight to ten,

16.132% (n=25) supervise more than ten professionals, and 3.23% (n=5) supervise just one

professional.

Figure 1

Visual Representation of Number of Supervisees

Number of Supervisees
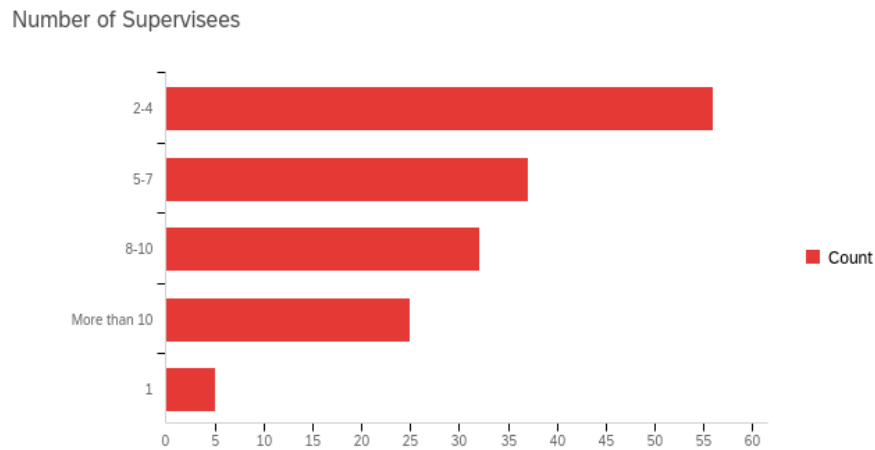
Respondents were then asked to select the option that best reflects the primary functional area of their job. There were 39 options based on NASPA's list of student affairs functional areas (Appendix C). Out of the 155 responses, 31 of the 39 functional areas were selected by participants. Most responses came from participants in the following functional areas: 14.19% (n=22) from career services, 9.03% (n=14) from academic advising and campus safety, 7.74% (n=12) from college unions and enrollment management, and 6.45% (n=10) from on-campus housing.

Supervision and Management Training

The remaining questions asked participants for responses surrounding the two research questions. The first research question asked how student affairs supervisors describe the preparation they received related to management and supervision of staff. The first question in this section asked participants to identify who provided their initial training related to personnel management and supervision in their current role. Participants were able to select all responses that apply. Most participants selected the option that they received training from their direct

supervisor with 30.04% of responses. The next most common response to who provided their initial training was 27.80% of responses indicating someone else in their unit such as a vice president or assistant vice president. Human resources were selected in 20.63% of responses and 11.66% indicated they received no formal initial training.

The next question asked participants to indicate what skills or topics were covered in their initial training. They were able to select all that apply. Out of 10 options, the most selected responses were 12.37% selecting communication and staff/personnel development training, 10.23% selected conflict management training, and 9.81% selected staff supervision training. The least selected responses were time management at 6.18% and diversity, equity, and inclusion training at only 4.90%.

When asked what skills participants wished were included as a part of their initial training that might have been left out or not covered, the most selected reply was staff personnel development/training. The next most selected responses were empathy/understanding your staff, conflict management, and interpersonal skills. The last question in the survey addressing research question one asked participants to select an answer that best represents the number of hours of training initially received related to management and supervision of personnel. After fielding out 24 responses who selected "none" as they did not receive any initial training, 131 responses were recorded. Of those 131 responses, 36.13% (n=56) received three to five hours of initial training, 21.29% (n=33) received just one to two hours of initial training, 17.42% (n=27) received over eight hours of training, and 9.68% (n=15) received six to eight hours of training (Figure 2).

Figure 2

Visual Representation of Hours of Initial Training Received

Hours of Initial Training
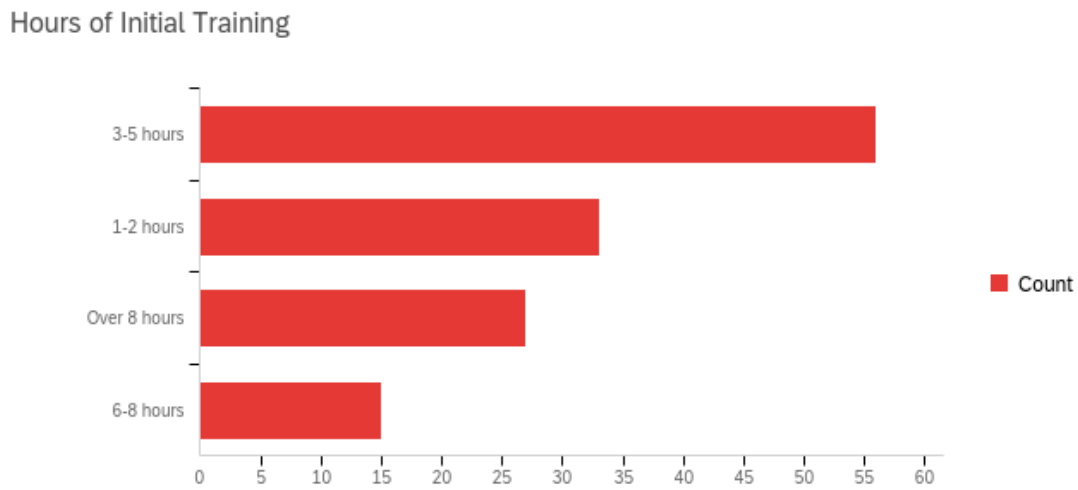
**Preparation and Job Satisfaction and Performance**

The second research question asked participants to describe the relationship between the preparation they received and their job satisfaction and performance. The three remaining questions addressed this topic. The first question was a multi-faceted question which asked participants to indicate their level of agreement to four statements using a five-point Likert scale. The first statement asked participants to indicate if the initial training received was a good use of their time. Of the 155 responses, 73.55% (n=114) of participants "strongly agreed" or "somewhat agreed" with the statement. The second statement asked participants to indicate level of agreement to whether their initial training prepared them to supervise professional staff. Out of 155 responses, 71.61% (n=111) of participants "strongly agreed" or "somewhat agreed" with the statement. The third statement asked participants if the initial training received added value to their overall preparedness as a supervisor. Of the 155 responses, 70.32% (n=109) of participants indicated they "strongly agreed" or "somewhat agreed" with the statement. The final statement in

this question asked participants if the initial training they received taught them skills that were important for them to have to supervise professional staff. Of the 155 responses, 67.10% (n=104) indicated they "strongly agreed" or "somewhat agreed" with the statement.

The next two questions in the questionnaire addressed any ongoing trainings participants received related to supervision and management of personnel since the initial training. The first question asked participants to indicate their level of agreement to whether their employer has offered ongoing trainings. Of the 155 responses, 79.97% (n=124) indicated they "strongly agreed" or "somewhat agreed" with the statement. The next question asked participants to identify the frequency of which ongoing trainings related to supervision and management of personnel occur (Figure 3). Of the 155 responses, 34.84 (n=54) indicated they receive training annually, 26.45% (n=41) received ongoing trainings once per semester, 16.77% (n=26) received training weekly, 14.19% (n=22) received training monthly, and 7.74% (n=12) indicated they have never received ongoing training.

Figure 3

Visual Representation of Ongoing Training
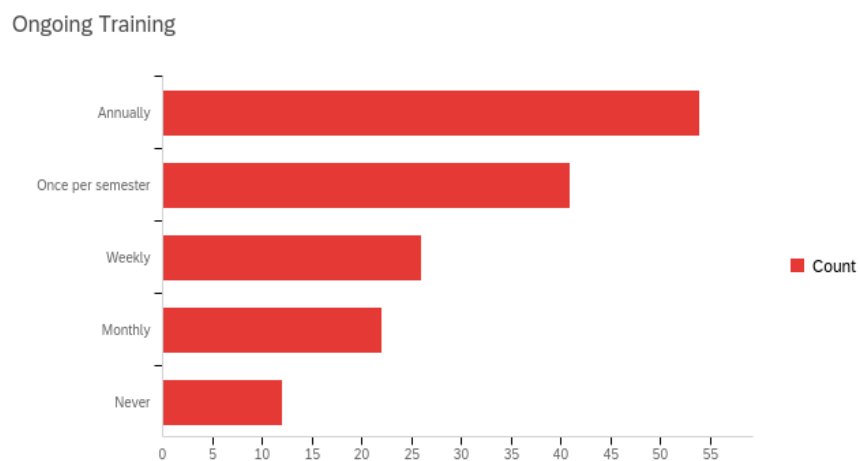
The final question was also multi-faceted and asked participants to indicate their level of agreement to six statements using a five-point Likert scale. The first three questions sought to highlight participant level of agreement to whether ongoing trainings related to management and supervision of personnel were a good use of their time and if they felt better equipped to handle management issues because of training they received. The next two questions sought insight from participants as to whether they feel more competent as a supervisor because of training and if training around supervision and management of personnel is a topic that should be covered in initial and ongoing professional development for supervisors. Finally, the last statement asked participants to identify whether they felt being trained appropriately regarding management and supervision of personnel was important to their job satisfaction. As Table 1 highlights below, participants were asked to indicate agreement with each of the six questions using a five-point Likert scale with one being "strongly agree" and five being "strongly disagree". While participant agreement levels varied slightly, the table below shows high levels of overall agreement for each of the six statements: most significantly on the last two statements around the importance of supervisor training and its relationship to job satisfaction.

Table 1

Participant's Perceptions about the Training

	M	SD	σ^2	N
The training…				
was a good use of participants' time	2.08	1.01	1.01	155
helped participants improve in the specific area	2.10	1.04	1.07	155
helped participants correctly handle any arising issues	2.20	1.02	1.06	155
made them feel as a competent supervisor	2.26	1.06	1.12	155
should be covered in initial and ongoing professional development	1.65	0.78	0.60	155
is important for participant's job satisfaction	1.80	0.81	0.65	155

In summary, this chapter focused on reporting participant perceptions around training and preparation received both initially and ongoing to be a student affairs supervisor. It also shared insight into participant perspectives on their overall preparedness to supervise others and whether ongoing trainings around topics of supervision and management are necessary. The last chapter of this study explores the results further with discussion, implications, and limitations.

CHAPTER V – DISCUSSION

This quantitative study sought to explore the experiences of student affairs supervisors in relation to their preparation and training and to assess what impact those experiences have on their job satisfaction and performance. A survey instrument was developed and administered which collected 155 participant responses that were then analyzed. This section discusses findings relevant from the study connected to the original problem statement and two guiding research questions. The underlying cause for this research was to explore ways in which supervisor training for student affairs professionals was conducted as well as if they are perceived to have impact on supervisor attitudes of competence and job satisfaction.

Participant Description of Training

Previous research showed consensus in the importance of the need for supervisor skill development surrounding topics such as management and supervision (Lovell & Kosten, 2000). This study supports prior research as participants indicated strong levels of agreement that the training they have received related to management and supervision of personnel has contributed to their overall success as a supervisor. In Winston and Creamer's work on supervision practices in student affairs in 1997, they noted from their research at the time that only about half of participants in their study indicated they had received initial training around skills like supervision and management. Contrary to that finding, this study revealed that only 11.66% of participants indicated receiving no formal initial training. This finding could signify that in the last two decades, student affairs administrators have found an increased need surrounding the importance of initial training for professionals around supervision and management.

An additional discovery to note in this research was that while there was an improvement reported from participants around having received an initial training on supervision, over half of

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participants (57.42%) denoted that the initial training was only five hours or less of their time. This finding could imply that supervisors are still not getting an adequate amount of initial training. If management and supervision is such a critical skill for student affairs personnel, there is certainly an implication that five hours or less could not be enough time to master elements of these skills. Despite this notion, participants still strongly agreed (71.61%) that the initial training contributed to their preparation in supervising staff.

Additional results from this study showed that the most prevalent topics covered in the supervisor training were communication, staff development, conflict management, and staff supervision. This evidence supports previous research in the literature such as Carpenter and Stimpson (2007) who documented participant support in stressing the need for more attention in training on skill development around managing and supervising others. Interestingly, research from this study found participants indicated the top skill they wished was included in their initial training that was not was staff personnel development and training. Therefore, those who received this critical piece of supervisor training saw the value in it while those who did not have this element as part of their initial training saw a need in incorporating it.

Prior research found in the literature also stressed how problematic ill-equipped supervisors can be in the workplace. Shupp and Arminio's (2012) work had entry-level professionals reporting their experiences with supervisors not equipped to supervise while Pace et al. (2019) found little training exists to prepare supervisors to manage others. This study sought to expand on past research by exploring participant experiences with ongoing trainings around supervision and personnel management. While 79.97% reported receiving ongoing trainings, results varied greatly as to the frequency in which they were held. The majority (61.29%) reported only receiving ongoing trainings annually or once a semester. Perhaps the

most shocking discovery is that nearly 8% reported having never received another training around supervision even though they supervise others. This finding supports research from Sermersheim and Keim (2005) around supervisors emphasizing the importance of skill development in management and supervision of others but not received it in their continued professional development.

Participant Relationship Between Job Performance and Satisfaction

Additionally, the evidence obtained in this study complements existing literature around job morale and satisfaction. In that regard, this study found strong levels of agreement that training around supervision and management greatly contributed to overall job satisfaction. Similarly, Marshall et al. (2016) documented that one contributing factor to people leaving the field was tied to issues with supervisors. Participants in this study reported strong levels of agreement that initial training was a good use of their time and that they felt more competent to be a supervisor based on the training received. They also shared agreement that topics surrounding training and management of personnel should be covered in the initial and ongoing professional development for supervisors. This finding supports prior research from Lovell and Kosten (2000) who reported strong ties to administrative and management skills as key skills needed to be effective supervisors. Additionally, Holmes (2014) found that entry-level professionals reported struggles in feeling not properly trained that they could directly connect back to whether they felt their supervisor was properly trained. The results of this study then further support previous studies' emphasis on the importance of training for student affairs supervisors.

Implications

Considering the findings of this study, there are several implications and recommendations for stakeholders to consider. These results, as well as current literature, continue to stress the need for the initial and ongoing supervision and management training of student affairs supervisors. Higher education administrators should heed the importance of this critical skill development in their student affairs leaders as these are key stakeholders in executing culture and morale in the workplace. When student affairs managers are ill-equipped to supervise, organizations can face crippling outcomes. Ultimately, this phenomenon has negative impacts on not only job morale and staff development in student affairs units, but it can also spread into the effectiveness of the division in supporting the ultimate goal of higher education: student persistence, retention, and graduation. The longer institutions ignore this important piece of divisional success, the more time, energy, and resources are wasted.

An additional recommendation is the importance of ongoing trainings pertaining to supervision and management. Perhaps the most shocking finding from this study is that nearly 8% of participants reported having never received another training around supervision even though they supervise others. With a finding that most participants only received five or less hours of initial training, it is important for stakeholders to recognize the value in continuing education around these topics. Just as other best practices and trends in the field evolve, supervision practices can evolve as well. It would be in the best interest of supervisors and their employees if they were able to receive ongoing trainings related to supervision and management of personnel.

The next recommendation centers on the skills covered in trainings. Diversity, equity, and inclusion training was marked very low by participants in this study at just 4.90% indicating

it was something covered in the initial training. However, 9.63% of participants indicated it was a skill they felt missing or that they wished they would have been trained on initially. This discovery has strong implications that administrators should pay attention to. As the workforce continues to diversify, competent managers around skills like diversity, equity, and inclusion must not be ignored.

Lastly, the participant pool was quite homogenous with most respondents being Caucasian. For higher education administrators and other stakeholders to create places of employment that are truly inclusive for people from all backgrounds, more training should be implemented on supporting people of color and other non-white colleagues in student affairs. Many institutions of higher learning tout newly created inclusion and diversity practices or similar positions and resources to make a stand that their places of employment are progressive and inclusive, but the question remains if they are also training their supervisors to employ inclusion practices in their management techniques. If not, findings from this study imply that could be a missing piece tied to effective management and supervision of all.

<div align="center">

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

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This section presents limitations of this research and proposes recommendations for overcoming them with future studies. First, data collected from this study only captured supervisors' self-reported information which can be biased. Questions gauged responses based on their recollection of training and on their perception of the value of that training on their competence and job satisfaction. Similarly, this study only assessed supervisor perspectives. Employees supervised by these participants were not a part of the study. A future angle to explore should include capturing data from supervisors and their supervisees, as well as using an

objective measures of employee performance to assess the effectives of specific training practices.

Additionally, while basic demographic information was collected for this study, this information was used only for descriptive purposes and was not analyzed for implications. Participants reported what type of institution they work at (four-year public or private) and reported on demographic factors such as race and gender. However, their responses were not dissected to determine if there were any of the demographic variables served as moderators for participants' responses or made them more or less likely to answer a certain way. Future research should explore the role that supervisor or supervisee demographics may have in shaping their experiences and perceptions. Finally, this was a quantitative study which did not ask for any type of qualitative data from participants. Collecting qualitative data could have helped provide further explanation and clarification into participant answers. Future research could investigate even more implications surrounding supervisor training and job satisfaction by imploring a study around these research questions that utilizes some qualitative questions for a more comprehensive understanding of participants' experiences and perceptions.

Conclusion

As higher education student affairs professionals continue to grapple with the changing landscape on the field in addition to new stressors like the Covid-19 pandemic, ensuring the quality and preparedness of professionals is extremely important. This study sought to explore the type of training student affairs supervisors initially received, to highlight their perceptions on how well that training prepared them to be supervisors, and to investigate how these elements contribute to their overall job satisfaction. Findings overwhelmingly suggest and support the existing literature declaring the importance of initial training around supervision and

management topics. Additionally, this research showed strong participant indication that training prepares them to do their job effectively. Future scholarship should emphasize the need for continued skill development and training for student affairs supervisors to ensure competent and successful professionals at the start of their supervisor careers and beyond.

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Questionnaire

Informed Consent Agreement

Q1. By clicking 'I Agree' below, you acknowledge that you have read the above information, are at least 18 years of age, and consent to participating in this survey.
- I agree.
- I do not agree.

Screening Questions (to determine participant eligibility)

Q2. Do you currently work in student affairs at an accredited four-year, non-profit, public or private institution in the United States? (must reply "yes" to continue)
- Yes
- No

Q3. Do you currently supervise at least one other professional staff member who is not a graduate student or undergraduate student? (must reply "yes" to continue)
- Yes
- No

Q4. What best describes the institution where you currently work? (must select first or second answer to continue)
- Four-year public accredited college or university
- Four-year private accredited college or university
- Other

Demographic Information

Q5. What is your gender?
- Male
  Female
  Non-binary
  Transgender
  Other
  Prefer not to say

Q6. With which race/ethnicity(ies) do you identify (select all that apply)?

- White/Caucasian
- Black or African American

- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Hispanic/Latino
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- Other
- Prefer not to answer

Q7. How many years have you worked professionally (not as a student worker) in higher education?
- Less than one year
- 1-5 years
- 6-10 years
- 11-15 years
- Over 15 years

Q8. How many years have you supervised staff?
- Less than one year
- 1-5 years
- 6-10 years
- 11-15 years
- Over 15 years

Q9. How many professionals do you currently supervise (not graduate or student staff)?
- 1
- 2-4
- 5-7
- 8-10
- Over 10

Q10. What title best describes your current role? (e.g., coordinator, director, dean, etc.)
_____

Q11. Select the option that best reflects the primary functional area of your job.
Drop down selection.
- Academic advising
- Admissions
- Alumni programs
- Campus activities
- Campus safety
- Career services
- Civic learning & democratic engagement
- Clinical health programs
- College union

- Community service/service learning
- Commuter student services
- Counseling services
- Disability support services
- Enrollment management
- Financial aid
- GLBT student services
- Graduate and professional student services
- Greek affairs
- Intercollegiate athletics
- International student services
- Learning assistance/academic support services
- Multicultural services
- Nontraditional-student services
- On-campus dining
- On-campus housing
- Orientation
- Recreational sports
- Registrar
- Spiritual life/campus ministry
- Student affairs assessment
- Student affairs fundraising and development
- Student affairs research
- Student conduct (academic integrity)
- Student conduct (behavioral case management)
- Student media
- TRIO/Educational opportunity
- Veterans' Services
- Wellness programs
- Women's Center

Questionnaire Questions

Q12. Related to your personnel management/supervision training, who provided any initial training for your current position? Select all that apply.
   A. Direct supervisor
   B. Someone else in your specific unit- AVP, VP, etc.
   C. Human Resources
   D. An outside consultant/trainer
   E. I received no formal initial training.
   F. Other

Q13. Which of the following topics/skills were covered in any initial training for your current position? Select all that apply.
- Supervision of staff
- Management of staff
- Communication
- Staff development and training
- Empathy/understanding your staff
- Conflict management
- Critical thinking
- Interpersonal skills
- Time management
- Diversity, equity and inclusion
- Other
- I received no initial training around any of these topics/skills.

Q14. Which of the following topics/skills do you wish you had been able to learn more about in the initial training for your current position? Select all that apply.
- Supervision of staff
- Management of staff
- Communication
- Staff development and training
- Empathy/understanding your staff
- Conflict management
- Critical thinking
- Interpersonal skills
- Time management
- Diversity, equity and inclusion
- Other
- None

Q15. Which answer best describes the number of hours of training you initially received **specifically related to supervision and management of personnel** in your current position?
- None
- 1-2 hours
- 3-5 hours
- 6-8 hours
- over 8 hours

Q16. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements. (Matrix) (Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree)
- The initial training I received was a good use of my time.
- The initial training I received prepared me to supervise professional staff.
- The initial training I received added value to my overall preparedness as a supervisor.

- The initial training I received taught me skills that were important for me to have to supervise professional staff.

Q17. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement. Since my initial training, my employer (either supervisor, HR, or otherwise) has offered ongoing trainings **specifically related to supervision and management of personnel**.
- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Q18. Which option best matches how often your employer (supervisor, HR, or otherwise) offers ongoing trainings **specifically related to supervision and management of personnel**?
- Never
- Annually
- Once per semester
- Monthly
- Weekly

Q19. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements. (Matrix) (Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree)
- I feel the ongoing trainings I have received related to management and supervision of personnel have been a good use of my time.
- I feel the ongoing trainings I have received related to management and supervision of personnel have been necessary to help me continue to improve in this specific area.
- Based on the training I received, I have been able to correctly handle any issues that have arisen related to management and supervision of personnel.
- Because of the training I received, I feel I am a competent supervisor.
- I feel that training around management and supervision of personnel is a topic that should be covered in initial and ongoing professional development for supervisors.
- Being trained appropriately regarding management and supervision of personnel is important to my job satisfaction.

APPENDIX B

IRB Approval Letter

Office of Research Integrity

THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI.

118 COLLEGE DRIVE #5125 • HATTIESBURG, MS | 601.266.6576 | USM.EDU/ORI

NOTICE OF INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD ACTION

The project below has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services regulations (45 CFR Part 46), and University Policy to ensure:

- The risks to subjects are minimized and reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered involving risks to subjects must be reported immediately. Problems should be reported to ORI via the Incident template on Cayuse IRB.
- The period of approval is twelve months. An application for renewal must be submitted for projects exceeding twelve months.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: IRB-21-165
PROJECT TITLE: A Quantitative Analysis of Student Affairs Supervisors Training and Job Satisfaction
SCHOOL/PROGRAM: VP for Student Affairs, Educational Research and Admin
RESEARCHER(S): Emily Holmes, Emily Johnson

IRB COMMITTEE ACTION: Approved
CATEGORY: Expedited
   7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

PERIOD OF APPROVAL: June 4, 2021

Donald Sacco Jr.

Donald Sacco, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board Chairperson

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NASPA Student Affairs Functional Areas

Academic advising
Admissions
Alumni programs
Campus activities
Campus safety
Career services
Civic learning & democratic engagement
Clinical health programs
College union
Community service/service learning
Commuter student services
Counseling services
Disability support services
Enrollment management
Financial aid
GLBT student services
Graduate and professional student services
Greek affairs
Intercollegiate athletics
International student services
Learning assistance/academic support services
Multicultural services
Nontraditional-student services
On-campus dining
On-campus housing
Orientation
Recreational sports
Registrar
Spiritual life/campus ministry
Student affairs assessment
Student affairs fundraising and development
Student affairs research
Student conduct (academic integrity)
Student conduct (behavioral case management)
Student media
TRIO/Educational opportunity
Veterans' Services
Wellness programs
Women's Center

APPENDIX D

Survey Instrument Distribution

The following is a listing of the social media groups the questionnaire graphic seeking participants was posted:

- Facebook Student Affairs Moms
- Facebook Southern Miss Higher Education and Student Affairs Graduate Programs
- Facebook Student Activities Professionals
- Facebook NASPA Fraternity and Sorority Life Professionals
- Facebook SOI Participants
- Facebook Future Dr. and Student Affairs Mothers
- Facebook Student Affairs Doctoral Students
- Facebook Student Affairs Professionals Involved with Leadership and Diversity Programs
- Facebook Student Affairs Mid-Level Professionals
- Facebook Student Organization Advisors (College and University)
- Facebook Student Affairs Moms Boss Edition

APPENDIX E

Graphic for Participants

Participants Needed For Research Study

Student Affairs Supervisors

PARTICIPANTS WILL COMPLETE A BRIEF SURVEY ABOUT SUPERVISOR TRAINING AND JOB SATISFACTION

Must currently supervise pro staff and work at an accredited 4-year institution in the United States.

Questions? Contact Emily.Holmes@usm.edu.

Approved by USM IRB (21-165)

APPENDIX F

SACSA Email Invitation for Participants

Dear potential participant,

You are invited to participate in a brief online study exploring student affairs supervisors' experiences regarding training and preparation and its impact on job performance and satisfaction as part of my doctoral studies Capstone project at The University of Southern Mississippi. Eligible participants are those currently working in student affairs at an accredited four-year institution, non-profit, public or private in the United States who supervise at least one other professional staff member who is not an undergraduate student or graduate student. Participation in the study is completely voluntary and offers no risk to participants. It should take no more than 10 minutes to complete. Participants completing the survey are able to enter their email address to be entered into a drawing for a $25 Amazon gift card. This is completely optional.

This study has been approved by The University of Southern Mississippi's Institutional Review Board (IRB 21-165).

Click here to participate

Thank you in advance for taking the time to participate in this important research.

Sincerely,

Emily Holmes
Doctoral Candidate, Higher Education Administration
The University of Southern Mississippi
Emily.Holmes@usm.edu