# An Exploration of the Role of the “Assistant to” in Student Affairs Using the Courageous Follower Model

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**Abstract**

As student affairs organizations have become more complex over time, there has been an increase in staff who work as "cross-organizational specialists" within these organizations. These staff typically work in the central office of a division of student affairs and have responsibilities which cut across the division, rather than focusing on the needs of a specific department. The most common of these positions is the "Assistant to" the Senior Student Affairs Officer (SSAO). This qualitative study sought to explore the work of those who work in these positions, using the Courageous Follower Model as a conceptual framework. This model posits five dimensions, with specific behaviors within each dimension, that demonstrate that an individual is a Courageous Follower; one who is an active contributor to their organization and its pursuit of the organization's "common purpose." The results of the study revealed that while most of the model applies to the work of the "Assistant to" there are some dimensions and associated behaviors which are not present to the same degree as others. The results also revealed that relationships are important to the work of staff in these positions. The relationship between the "Assistant to" and the SSAO is particularly important in facilitating their ability to demonstrate behaviors associated with othe Courageous Follower Model. Finally, the results provide support for possibly adding a new dimension to the model, as it relates to the work of the "Assistant to" in Student Affairs. Implications of this study address staff who work in this position or similar ones, SSAO and other senior leaders inside and outside of higher education, as well as individuals who may be interested in working as an "Assistant to."

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# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

## Introduction

Recently, institutions of higher education in the United States, particularly public ones, have been impacted by declining resources, increasing demands for accountability from various stakeholders, including evidence of student learning, and a changing student body with diverse needs and experiences (Kuk, 2012a; Romano, Hanish, Phillips, & Waggoner, 2010). As a result, student affairs organizations have had to reevaluate how they are organized so that they may accomplish their missions (Kuk, 2012a). One way that student affairs organizations are responding to changing times is adapting their organizational structures to increase efficiency, reduce costs, and improve collaboration inside their organizations, as well as across their respective institutions. One manifestation of the effort to change student affairs organizational structures is the trend of hiring cross-organizational specialists (Tull & Kuk, 2012).

Cross-organizational specialists within student affairs are staff who are not hired to focus on a particular functional area (e.g., admissions, counseling, leadership programs), or a specific population (e.g., first-year students, students with disabilities, students of color). They are staff hired "…primarily to address emerging challenges and enhance the use of resources by sharing roles and resources laterally across student affairs units and organizations" (Kuk, 2012a, p. 8). They provide several benefits, including fostering collaboration, enhancing staff excellence, and bringing new skill sets and backgrounds into the student affairs profession (Kuk, 2012a).

The literature that discusses the growth in the use of cross-organizational specialists, and the typical functions that they perform is similar to other literature within student affairs and higher education. The staff are viewed as subordinates within their organizations and the primary focus is on the leaders of the organizations for which they work. However, within the leadership literature there is an increasing acknowledgment of the role that followers can play in the success of organizations (Kezar, Carducci, & Contreras-McGavin, 2006). A recent article in the *Wall Street Journal* highlighted the role that followers can play in their organizations by noting “Skillful followers are self-starters who think independently, notice and solve problems, help the boss meet goals and deliver criticism to higher ups when needed” (Shellenbarger, 2015, pp. D1 & D3). Another recent article about followers appeared in the *Star Tribune* and quoted a faculty member in Organizational Behavior as saying “Followership may be an underestimated form of leadership” (Rosenblum, 2015).

Many authors, including Kelley (1988; 1992), Kellerman (2008), and Chaleff (2009) have written about the contributions that followers make to the leadership process and make the case the followers are a dynamic part of an organization, and not just individuals who wait for direction from their superiors. Chaleff (2009), for example, in presenting his model of Courageous Followership states that “The sooner we move beyond these images [seeing followers are docile, conformists, and weak with a failure to excel] and get comfortable with the idea of powerful followers supporting powerful leaders, the sooner we can fully develop and test the model for dynamic, self-responsible, synergistic relationships in our organizations” (p. 3). This emerging view of followers presents the opportunity to examine the role of cross-organizational specialists from a difference perspective.

The most prevalent type of cross-organizational specialist in student affairs organizations is the “Assistant to” according to a recent survey of 250 senior student affairs officers (SSAO) (Tull & Rammell, 2012). Of those SSAO surveyed about cross-organizational specialist positions, 34.6% indicated that they had an “Assistant to” or chief of staff position within their student affairs organization. Of those institutions with either of these two positions, 83.5% had an “assistant to.” These two positions are most common at public four-year institutions (51.2%) when compared to private four-year institutions (29.8%) and generally speaking all types of specialist positions were more prevalent in public institutions than at private ones.

The “Assistant to” position began to become a common feature in the business world as corporations became more complex in the 1950s, and initially had two general uses according to Whisler (1956). The title was often used for the “…incompetent but senior executive…” who had been removed from a position, but remained with the company. The other use of the title was for those individuals who were expected to “…make a contribution to the successful operation of his [sic] company” (p. 274). The chief executive who created such a position would often explain that there was a need for someone to handle “special projects;” tasks that were too important to be delegated, but too time consuming for the CEO to handle personally. According to interviews with individuals holding these positions, there were three primary functions, including assisting their boss with interpreting the information received from subordinates, interpreting their boss for those who work below her/him, and initiating the flow of information about organizational needs to the executive that they might not receive otherwise (Whisler, 1956).

Although this position was common in the corporate sector, it also exists in a variety of other settings, including the military, federal government, city management, and higher education (Whisler, 1960; Stringer, 1977). Whisler (1960) studied these positions in all of the above areas, except higher education, and highlighted several commonalities among them. These include the role of the “Assistant to” as an intermediary between the executive and those who they must interact with, the flexibility of the role and the activities associated with it, and the dependency of the job of the “Assistant to” on the mutual relationship between themselves and the executive for whom they work.

The “Assistant to” position has existed in higher education since 1904 when Oberlin College created the position of “assistant to the president” (Giddens, 1971). Although this position was created in the early part of the 20th Century, there were not a critical mass of individuals in this position until the 1950s and 1960s.

Despite the long history of this position within higher education, the literature on the “Assistant to” within this sector is limited and outdated. Among the most “current” literature on this topic are: Giddens, 1971; Stringer, 1977; and Mallory, Castillo Clark, and Shulz, 2012. Mallory, et al. (2012) is the only one to discuss the “Assistant to” within student affairs organizations. Whisler (1956 & 1960) as noted earlier, also discusses the “Assistant to,” but not within higher education. In addition, the literature on the “Assistant to” whether in higher education generally, or in student affairs specifically, is primarily descriptive in nature, rarely going beyond a discussion of the tasks performed by those in this role and the types of institutions where they work (Mallory, et al., 2012).

Another deficit in the existing literature is that there is insufficient discussion of the contributions that those in this position make to their organizations

Giddens (1971) found in a study of the "assistant to the president" role that they were more likely to exist at public institutions than at private ones, which is similar to the finding of Tull and Rammell (2012) regarding the "Assistant to" within student affairs organizations. According to Giddens (1971), the duties of the "assistant to the president" varied widely, which is true of individuals in similar positions today within student affairs (Mallory, Castillo Clark, & Shulz, 2012). The most commonly performed duties by the respondents in Giddens' (1971) survey were serving as a member of a committee of top-level administrators (89%), supervising or conducting research on institutional policies, practices, procedures and problems (75%), helping develop long range plans (73%), and writing speeches or other documents used by the president/chancellor (73%).

Stringer (1977) built on the work of Giddens (1971) by studying the "Assistant to" in higher education more generally. He identified six role types of "Assistant to" at the institutions studied, including two roles which appear to be the most similar to the role of the contemporary "Assistant to" in student affairs organizations: the *military staff* and the *freelance*r. *Military staff* types receive assignments from their superordinates, work on shorter-term projects, have few ongoing responsibilities and are expected to be able to move from one project to another. The special project nature of their role, as described by Stringer is very similar to those in the "Assistant to" position in student affairs organizations who are often assigned special projects on which to work (Mallory, Castillo Clark, & Shulz, 2012). *Freelancers* are those individuals who are able to transcend typical organizational boundaries. They are generalists and receive assignments from their superordinates, but have a great deal of freedom with regard to how they complete their assignments. The role of the *freelancer*, is also similar to the role played by the "Assistant to" within student affairs. Individuals in this position work with other staff across the organization and outside of student affairs on a regular basis, and are the "go to" person for those wishing to know what the SSAO thinks about an issue or a particular initiative's direction (Mallory, Castillo Clark, & Shulz).

The increased frequency of the "Assistant to" position within student affairs is linked to changes in the field of higher education, as well as the role of the Senior Student Affairs Officer (SSAO) (Kuk, 2012a). As noted earlier, within higher education there are increasing demands for accountability and demonstration of student learning, in addition to decreasing funding, particularly for public institutions. These demands and funding challenges have impacted the student affairs organization, as well as the position of the SSAO (Dungy & Ellis, 2011; Hemphill, 2012). Additionally, the portfolio of student affairs organizations has expanded and evolved over time in response to the changing needs of students (Kuk & Banning, 2009; Manning, Kinzie, & Schuh, 2006). Within student affairs organizations, SSAO cite many reasons for creating the "Assistant to" position, including having a staff person to handle day-to-day operations within the office of the SSAO, having someone with the flexibility to take on a variety of projects, and having someone who can assist with various communication efforts, including drafting letters, speeches, and presentations (Tull, Brazzell, Harbin, Broyles, & Flanagan, 2009). Other duties include crisis management, assessment, strategic planning and grant writing.

The duties of the "Assistant to" within student affairs at different institutions have similarities and differences. Mallory, Castillo Clark, and Shulz (2012) reviewed the position descriptions of 25 “Assistant to” positions in student affairs at 22 four-year colleges, and in every instance the “Assistant to” reported directly to the SSAO, although they had a variety of titles. The most common job responsibilities were assessment (84%) and communications (56%). In addition, special projects were a common feature of these positions. Forty-four percent reported being asked frequently to perform duties outside of their job descriptions.

## Problem Statement

Despite the emergence of “Assistant to” positions, there is a lack of specific information in the literature about these positions and the people who fill them. The literature that does exist is primarily descriptive in nature, highlighting “what” an “Assistant to” does, rather than “how” they perform their unique job. The existing literature fails to explore how individuals who are in this role see their work and how they evaluate the contributions they make to their organizations. The literature seemingly views them as mere subordinates and not as individuals who can contribute greatly to the success of an organization. Additionally, the literature does not examine the role of the “Assistant to” through a theoretical lens or conceptual framework.

SSAO lack relevant information regarding the value of these positions, as well as the optimal skills, abilities and educational background for staff in these positions. As a result, sometimes the only information available is the anecdotal experience of colleagues with similar positions, or their personal experience with these positions in their current or previous institutions. In times of diminishing resources for higher education, additional information about the nature of the “Assistant to” role would be useful for SSAO. They can use this information to justify keeping an existing “Assistant to” position or creating a new one. This is particularly true at public institutions where there are often unique financial pressures on student affairs organizations (Romano, Hanish, Phillips, & Waggoner, 2010).

While there is a body of research about student affairs personnel who are in specific categories of staff (i.e., new professionals/entry level, middle managers, and senior student affairs officers) within student affairs organizations, there is very little research on staff in specific roles, with the exception of those who are SSAO, which is mostly descriptive in nature. The prevalence of specialist positions within student affairs organizations and the lack of knowledge about specialists broadly, as well as those in specific positions (e.g., director of human resources, assistant to, director of development), indicate an area ripe for exploration and discovery. The "Assistant to" position in student affairs is the specialty position most worthy of additional study since it is the most common cross-organizational specialist position within student affairs and its popularity is growing (Tull & Rammell, 2012). In a time of declining resources, particularly for public institutions SSAO and other institutional decision makers need supporting evidence to determine if positions such as these are a worthy investment.

Calls for additional research into the role of the "Assistant to" in higher education began more than 30 years ago. For example, Stringer (1977) noted the lack of information about the "Assistant to" position in the literature and cited several consequences, including the lack of guidelines for the utilization of this position by chief executives and a lack of understanding about the proper functions of these positions. Stringer also identified several areas of future inquiry regarding the "Assistant to" in higher education, including an analysis of how "Assistant to" positions fit into administrative staffing patterns, and the impact of “Assistant to” positions on the desired interaction patterns within a university. Although not mentioned by Stringer, additional research is also needed to provide guidance to properly prepare future professionals for careers as an “Assistant to.” Stringer’s advocacy for additional research into this position is germane today given the increase of these positions within the student affairs profession. The consequences cited by Stringer in 1977 of the lack of exploration into this position are still relevant in 2014.

More recently there have been calls for more research into the role of the “Assistant to” within student affairs organizations specifically. Mallory, Castillo Clark, and Shulz (2012) assert that there is lack of understanding of the professional development needs of staff who work in these positions. Increased professional development would help to enhance the effectiveness of staff in these positions and would help to identify best practices. Kuk and Banning (2009) recommend further exploration of emerging student affairs organizations, i.e., those with cross-organizational specialist positions, such as the “assistant to.” Particular areas of inquiry could include to what extent these structures enhance organizational effectiveness and the ability of student affairs units to achieve their divisional and institutional goals and missions.

One of the ways to explore the “Assistant to” position within student affairs is to examine the manner in which the “Assistant to” positions do their work *vis a vis* the SSAO to whom they report. A useful framework for this exploration is the concept of followership because it allows one to examine how an “Assistant to” interacts with and supports a leader, as well as how they work with others who also “follow” the leader. As mentioned earlier, Whisler (1960) noted the importance of the mutual relationship between the “Assistant to” and the executive for which he/she worked. The dynamics of this relationship can be explored through the lens of followership. The concept of followership is also useful because it helps examines the role of the follower in the success of an organization. The lens of followership, particularly the Courageous Follower model espoused by Chaleff (2009), can provide insight into the work of the “Assistant to” in student affairs organizations, which may in turn provide a foundation and catalyst for future research exploration into this emerging and growing position.

## Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

This study examined the role of staff who work in the “Assistant to” position for a senior student affairs officer (SSAO) using the lens of Chaleff’s Courageous Follower model. The research questions are as follows:

1. How do Chaleff’s five dimensions (and associated behaviors) of a Courageous Follower manifest themselves in the work of the “Assistant to” in student affairs organizations?
2. Are there additional behaviors displayed by those in the “Assistant to” role that are not included in Chaleff’s model?
3. In the opinion of the “Assistant to” in student affairs in what ways does their role contribute to the organizational effectiveness and goal achievement of their respective student affairs organization?
4. In the opinion of the “Assistant to” in student affairs in what ways do they contribute to the success of the SSAO for whom they work?

# CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

## Introduction

Institutions of higher education in the United States have been buffeted in recent years by a number of internal and external factors which impact how they operate and fulfill their mission of educating students (Kuk, 2012a). These factors include declining resources, particularly a problem for public institutions, and increasing demands for accountability from various stakeholders, including demonstrating the achievement of student learning outcomes. Today's colleges and universities must contend with ever-changing technology, which has impacted how students learn, communicate, socialize, and interact with the institution. Additionally, the student body is an increasingly diverse one with regard to identity, as well as experiences and unique needs.

In response to these changes, higher education institutions and student affairs divisions have had to reevaluate how they are organized so that they may accomplish their respective missions (Kuk, 2012a). Student affairs leaders in institutions of all types are beginning to respond to the current environment in higher education by adapting their organizational structures in order to increase efficiency, reduce costs, and improve collaboration inside their organizations, as well as across their respective institutions. One manifestation of the effort to change student affairs organizational structures is the trend of hiring cross-organizational specialists (Tull & Kuk, 2012). Cross-organizational specialists are staff who are not hired to focus on a particular functional area (e.g., admissions, counseling, leadership programs), or a specific population (e.g., first-year students, students with disabilities, students of color). They are staff hired "…primarily to address emerging challenges and enhance the use of resources by sharing roles and resources laterally across student affairs units and organizations” (Kuk, 2012a, p. 8).

These specialists appear to be an emerging group of staff within student affairs organizations. They are typically part of the student affairs division’s central office, but work across the division in areas such as development, communications, human resources and technology, rather than be assigned to a specific functional unit. These individuals may also include staff with the title “chief of staff” or “assistant to.” According to a recent survey of 250 senior student affairs officers (SSAO), 13.1% reported having a specialist in development, 19.1% had a technology specialist, and 34.6% had either a chief of staff or an “Assistant to”, the most common specialist position within student affairs (Tull & Rammell, 2012).

Despite the increase in the use of these positions within student affairs, there is little current research about the individuals who occupy these positions, the nature of their work, their academic preparation, the optimal skills needed to perform their duties, or their professional development needs. Most of what is written about staff in these positions is descriptive in nature and focuses on the tasks they perform, the prevalence of the position, and the rationale for creating them (Tull & Kuk, 2012). There is little discussion about “how” they perform their job and the value the staff in these positions bring to their respective organizations. While there is a body of research about student affairs personnel who are in specific categories of staff (i.e., new professionals/entry level, middle managers, and senior student affairs officers) within student affairs organizations, there is very little research on staff in specific roles, with the exception of those who are SSAO. However, much of this literature about SSAO is descriptive in nature as well.

The large body of literature on SSAO highlights another issue: a preoccupation with the leaders of an organization and a lack of sufficient focus on the followers. Bennis (1999), Kelley (1992) and Chaleff (2009), among others, advocate for an increased focus on the ways in which followers can contribute to organizations and the role that they play in the leadership process. Kezar, Carducci, and Conteras-McGavin (2006) note a trend in the leadership literature which recognizes the role that followers play in the leadership process. As student affairs organizations reevaluate their organizational structure to respond to a changing environment, it may also be the time to reevaluate the primary focus on the SSAO with regard to the success of student affairs organizations and explore the contributions of followers as well.

The prevalence of specialist positions within student affairs organizations and the lack of knowledge about specialists broadly, as well as those in specific positions (e.g., director of human resources, assistant to, director of development), indicate an area ripe for exploration and discovery. The "Assistant to" position in student affairs may be the specialty position most worthy of additional study since it is the most common cross-functional/specialty position within student affairs. Given the need to explore more than just the "what" that staff in this position do, but the "how," a framework that focuses on the role of a follower in organizations may prove useful. The Courageous Follower model of followership proposed by Chaleff (2009), which postulates five behaviors which are demonstrated by exemplary followers, presents a useful lens through which to evaluate the position of the "Assistant to" in student affairs.

The rest of this chapter will provide an overview of the literature which provides a foundation for the proposed study of the “Assistant to” in student affairs. The review of the literature will begin with a discussion of the literature related to leadership and followership, including a discussion of the Courageous Follower model (Chaleff, 2009), as well as other models. Next there will be a thorough discussion of student affairs in the United States, including the emergence of the profession, the emergence of specialist positions, student affairs organizational models, and various topics related to staff in student affairs. The literature review will conclude with a review of existing literature regarding the “Assistant to” within higher education generally, and within student affairs specifically.

## Leadership and Followership

Although staff in the “Assistant to” role may be leaders within their organization, in that they are responsible for specific tasks necessary to move the organization forward, by the nature of their position, they are primarily followers. Within their respective student affairs organizations, their primary role is to support the SSAO for whom they work and assist them as needed (Mallory, Castillo Clark, & Shulz, 2012). Although it is important to examine the literature regarding leadership, particularly as it relates to followers, is it perhaps more important to examine the literature which is primarily focused on the role of the follower in the leadership process.

There is an abundance of literature regarding leadership and how it can impact the success of organizations of all types**.** However, the same cannot be said for the issue of followership. For example, Beegle and Dixon (2006) found 95,220 titles in an online bookstore devoted to leadership, and only 792 titles related to followers or followership.

This is despite the fact that, as many authors have pointed out, that without followers, there cannot be leaders and that followers are key to making change in organizations (Bennis, 1999; Chaleff, 2009; and Kelley, 1988 and 1992). For example, according to Bennis (1999) "….exemplary leadership and organizational change are impossible without the full inclusion, initiatives, and cooperation of followers" (p. 4).

Various authors, including Kelley (1992) and Chaleff (2009) have called for a different perspective on leadership: One that is more dynamic and recognizes the role of the follower in the success of organizations and in the success of leaders. According to Kelley a key attribute of a leader is the ability to attract and retain followers. He asserts that "without followers, leadership is meaningless and leaders don't exist" (p. 46). He also states that between 70 and 90% of time spent working during person's life, is working as a follower. Dixon (2009) notes that followers dominate all organizations, yet the focus on the leader prevents a proper consideration of the nature and importance of the follower to the success of the organization and the leader. Chaleff states that the knowledge-driven nature of our contemporary organizations require a changing view of the role of the follower.

**Defining Followers and Followership**

Followers have been defined in the literature in various ways. Kelley (1992), who is considered a seminal contributor to the understanding of followers and their role in the leadership process, noted "The word 'follower' has its etymological roots in Old High German *follaziohan*, which means to assist, help, succor, or minister to" (p. 34). Fobbs (2010) proposes to define followers as "…an organizational or group member who interacts and reports to or accepts the authority of another group/organizational member who is designated as a leader" (p. 28). He bases this definition on the work of several contributors to the field including Kelley (1992), Kellerman (2008), and Chaleff (2009). Kellerman (2008) defines followers as "…subordinates who have less power, authority, and influence than do their superiors, and who therefore usually, but not invariably, fall into line." (p. xxi). Chaleff, who has contributed greatly to the understanding of followers specifically with the Courageous Follower Model (which will be discussed in more detail later), does not define follower, in part to avoid controversy, according to Dixon (2003). However, his model does identify several important behavioral attributes of exemplary followers.

Dixon (2003), as part of a study to operationalize Chaleff's model of the Courageous Follower, defines follower but within the context of a synthesized definition of followership, which is a useful approach. According to Dixon (2003), followership is "…the free will recognition of leadership in the commitment towards realization of the collectively adopted organizational vision and culture and is based on leader-follower shared values and trust" (p. 11). Dixon's definition of followership is useful because it integrates various views of followers, including Chaleff's attention to the values demonstrated by followers, Bailey's (1988) conception of a follower as "…someone who accepts guidance and, on receiving it, takes the appropriate action" (p. 11), Vecchio's (1997) view of followers as people who have a sense of responsibility, commitment, loyalty and maturity, and Sanford's (1950) opinion that followers are an essential element in any action involving leadership. With Dixon's definition of followership as a guide, a follower can be defined as any member of an organization who is exercising followership (Dixon).

## Leadership Approaches and Theories Relevant to Followership

Over time, leadership concepts and theories have evolved, and while some of them do include followers, the role of the follower is almost always as a subordinate with the primary focus on the leader. It is becoming more common for general leadership literature to include the role of the follower *vis a vis* the leader, or to focus solely on the role of the follower in the leadership process (Kellerman, 2008). With regard to the leadership literature within higher education Kezar, Carducci, and Contreras-McGavin (2006) note a shift in leadership studies to include those who do not hold positions of authority or power as part of the leadership process. The inclusion of followers is welcome because the focus on the role of the leader at the exclusion of the follower in leadership conversations and practices, as well as in the leadership literature, prevents an adequate focus on the relationship between the leader and the follower and their interdependence (Dixon, 2003). As Whisler (1960) notes, this relationship is important for those in the "Assistant to" role.

Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995) propose a taxonomy of leadership that is comprised of three domains: the leader, the follower, and the relationship. While they acknowledge the value of exploration of each domain separately, they also note that exploring leadership across domains may increase the usefulness and validity of leadership studies. In the leader domain, the primary focus is on the leader. There are a number of critical issues that are of interest in studies which explore this domain, including the personal characteristics, attitudes, and behaviors that enable a leader to achieve certain outcomes. In the follower domain, the focus is on the follower. The critical issues of interest are similar to those within the leader domain, but with the follower as the intended unit of study. The findings of studies in this domain inform the understanding of followership and its relationship to desired leadership outcomes. The relationship domain focuses on the relationship between leaders and followers. Within this domain the critical issues of interest are relational characteristics such as trust, and mutual respect, and how effective leadership relationships can be developed to lead to desired leadership outcomes.

There are a myriad of theories and approaches to leadership which are noted in the literature. While many are essentially silent on the role of the follower, some acknowledge their contribution to the leadership process to varying degrees. Below are examples of several leadership theories or approaches that have relevance to the role that followers can play in the success of leaders and organizations.

Situational Leadership Theory is an approach that was developed by Hersey and Blanchard (1969) and often used in leadership training within organizations (Northouse, 2004). The core concept of this theory is that a leader changes her/his leadership style based on the needs of the situation (Northhouse). Effective leaders are those one who can change their approach as needed. According to the Situational Leadership Theory, the leader has to evaluate the competence and commitment of the follower in order to determine how to approach a specific situation (Northouse). This leadership theory acknowledges the role of the follower, but minimally and only in regard to whether the follower has deficits that need to be addressed or skills that can assist the leader in accomplishing the desired outcome. As a result, this theory is an example of one that focuses on both the leader and follower domain, even though the latter is not the primary focus.

Within the Situational Leadership Theory, the primary role of the leader is to help the follower maximize her/his ability to contribute to the organization (Northouse, 2004). They do this by demonstrating directive or task behaviors and supportive or relationship behaviors vis a vis their subordinates (Northouse). Directive behaviors are those which help members of a group by providing directions, establishing timelines and clarifying roles. Supportive behaviors assist group members to feel comfortable about themselves and/or co-workers doing things such as asking for input, offering praise, and sharing information about oneself. Situational Leaders can demonstrate one of four leadership styles (i.e., delegating, supporting, coaching, and directing), depending on the extent to which they use directive and supportive behaviors (Northouse). They also must consider the development level of their subordinates or followers by evaluating their level of commitment and competence.

Contingency Theory was espoused by Fiedler (1967) among others. It asserts that the effectiveness of a leader is based on the extent to which a leader’s style fits the context of a particular leadership challenge (Northouse, 2004). An effective leader is one whose style matches the situation, although unlike with situational leadership, the leader is not expected to change her/his style depending on the situation. According to the theory, leaders exhibit leadership styles that are either task motivated or relationship motivated (Northouse). Although this theory focuses primarily on the leader domain, it also explores the follower and relationship domains since they can impact the effectiveness of the leader.

A leader’s style within Contingency Theory, measured by The Least Preferred Coworker (LPC) instrument developed by Fiedler (1967), is described by Northouse

(2004). Those who score high on this instrument are considered to be relationship-motivated leaders and those who score low are considered to be task-motivated leaders (Northouse). Task-motivated leaders are those who are focused on reaching a particular goal, as opposed to relationship-motivated leaders who are more concerned about developing close relationships with others. The theory also identifies several situational factors which will help determine the type of leader that is needed. A leader's leadership style will predict how well they will perform in particular situations. Although within this leadership theory leaders are not expected to change their leadership style, the theory implies that the leader can take steps to change the situation so that it is a better match for their particularly style of leaders (Northouse).

Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) Theory is a theory that exists primarily in the relationship domain of Graen and Uhl-Bien's (1995) leadership taxonomy mentioned previously. This theory focuses on the dyadic relationship between followers and leaders (Graen & Uhl-Bien). Prior to LMX Theory, the commonly accepted notion was that leaders treated their followers all the same using an average leadership style (Northouse, 2004). In earlier versions of this theory the focus was on the vertical linkage between the leader and each follower. The leader's relationship with a work unit or organization was viewed within the context of two types of linkages (Graen & Uhl-Bien). If the leader and follower had a relationship that was based on expanded roles and responsibilities the follower was said to be in the "in group". If the leader and the follower had a relationship that seemed to be based primarily on the terms of their employment contract and clearly defined roles, the follower was said to be in the "out group". Those who were in the "in group" had better relationships with the leader than those in the "out group" and as a result they received more information and influence. As LMX theory continued to evolve the focus shifted toward the concept of "leadership making" which asserts that leaders should develop "high-quality exchanges" with all of their subordinates, as opposed to only some of them (Graen & Uhl-Bien). The goal is to make every subordinate or follower feel that they are part of the in-group.

According to Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995), leadership making takes place in three phases. During the "stranger" phase the leader and subordinate relate to each other as dictated by their roles in the organization and hierarchy. During the "acquaintance" stage the leader and the subordinate assess each other. The leader evaluates to what extent the subordinate is willing to take on more responsibility, and the subordinate evaluates to what extent the leader is willing to provide new challenges. The leader and subordinate develop a greater level of trust and respect for each other during this phase. During the "partner" phase there is a high degree of trust between the leader and the follower. The leader relies on the subordinate to take on additional responsibilities, and the subordinate looks to the leader for support and encouragement. When leaders and subordinates reach this phase, the focus of each moves from individual self-interest to what is best for the team or the organization.

Transformational Leadership Theory is a leadership approach that has been the subject of a great deal of research and discussion in recent decades (Dvir, Eden, Avolio, & Shamir, 2002; Northouse, 2004). It examines leadership as a process which can transform and change the individuals who are involved. Transformational leadership "….is concerned with emotions, values, ethics, standards, long-term goals, and includes assessing followers' motives, satisfying their needs, and treating them as full human beings." (Northouse, 2004, p. 169). This approach to leadership centers on the leader and follower domains by exploring how the leader can enhance the ability of the follower to reach their greatest potential.

Transformational leadership has evolved over the years. Burns (1978) was one of the first scholars to discuss transformational leadership by asserting that leaders try to tap into the motives of their followers so that they are more likely to reach the goals of both the leaders and followers. Burns distinguished between two types of leadership in his writings: transactional and transformative. Transactional leadership pertains to exchanges between leaders and followers, such as when a manager gives a raise to an employee in return for excellent performance. Transformational leadership exists where the follower and leader engage in such a way that they establish a connection. That connection increases the motivation of both parties and causes the leader to pay more attention to the needs and motives of the followers so that the followers can reach their maximum potential. Bass (1985) built upon the work of Burns and others by focusing more on the needs of the followers and less on the needs of the leader. Bass (1985) argues that followers are motivated by transformational leaders by doing the following: "(a) raising followers levels of consciousness about the importance and value of specified and idealized goals, (b) getting followers to transcend their own self-interest for the sake of the team or organization, and (c) moving followers to address higher-level needs" (p. 20).

Each of the theories highlighted above addresses the role of followers in the leadership process in different ways. Within Situational Leadership Theory, the role of the follower in leadership processes is clearly as a subordinate. The leader's primary task is to evaluate the ability of the follower to perform a task and then determine which leadership style would be most effective in ensuring that the task is completed. Contingency Theory focuses almost exclusively on the role of the leader in the leadership process. The attention paid to followers is minimal and only with regard to the fact that followers are part of the context that determines whether or not the leader will be successful. The theory does not explicitly recognize that followers can intentionally contribute to the context in such a way as to help or hinder a leader's ability to succeed. Leadership-Member Exchange Theory (LMX) is a leadership theory that pays significant attention to the role of the follower in the leadership process. The theory does this by its focus on the nature of the relationship between the follower and the leader, and realizes that the follower can have an impact on the leader's ability to succeed and the organization's ability to reach its desired goals. It acknowledges that followers are not there just to be led in one direction or another, but that they can greatly contribute to the success of an organization if the right relationship exists between the leader and the follower. Like LMX Theory, Transformational Leadership Theory also recognizes the value of the follower in the leadership process. However, the follower is viewed as someone who needs the leader to help her/him reach their potential so that the leader and the organization can succeed. While this approach indicates a genuine concern about the development of the follower, it does not seem to be primarily for the follower's benefit. This theory also implies that the follower is dependent on the leader for their success.

**Followership Models and Theories**

Having reviewed several leadership theories and approaches and their inclusion of followership, it is important to examine various models and theories which focus primarily on the role of the follower in the leadership process. These theories and approaches shed important light on why an individual may choose to be a follower, and also, more importantly, demonstrate how the follower can contribute to the success of the organization and/or the leader.

**Kelley's paths to followership.** Kelley (1988; 1992) authored what is generally considered to be the seminal works on followership when he published an article called *In Praise of Followers*, and a book called *The Power of Followership* to draw more attention to the role of the follower in the leadership process. In describing his interest in followers Kelley (1992) stated "I realized that few people had studied followers since all of the attention was focused on leaders. When people did study followers, they simply asked for their views about leaders. The prevailing assumption was that followers had nothing of interest to say about themselves" (p. 12). According to Kelley (1992) it is important to understand why some people choose to follow, rather than to lead.

Understanding why someone becomes a follower is important for those who lead organizations so that they can provide an environment which helps to recruit and retain these individuals. Kelley (1992) asserts that followers take one of seven paths to being a follower: Apprentice, Disciple, Mentee, Comrade, Loyalist, Dreamer, and Lifeway. The path that a follower takes is the one that appeals to them and they make this decision, in part, according to personal motivations (Kelley).

In Kelley's (1992) model, there are two sets of personal motivations which can determine a person's path to followership. A follower's path to followership is guided by their desire to express themselves, as opposed to a desire to transforming themselves. Those who wish to express themselves tend to be happy with their lifestyle and accomplishments, but want to use their skills to contribute to the success of an organization. On the other end of this continuum are those who are not happy with who they are and as a result seek followership as a way of becoming a different and better person. A follower's path to followership is also guided by an appreciation for interpersonal involvement and relationships (Kelley). These individuals become followers due to the opportunity to follow individuals. Those at the other end of the continuum place emphasis on their internal goals and aspirations and followership is a way for them to be achieved.

As stated above, Kelley (1992) suggests that there are seven paths to followership. These paths are described briefly below.

- The *Apprentice* is the follower who is motivated by the desire to become a leader. They understand that they need to "learn the ropes" by proving themselves as a follower.
- The *Disciple* is someone who places him or herself into a relationship with a leader so that they can receive a body of knowledge from them. Over time the disciple typically becomes a convert to the leader's point of view.
- The *Mentee* seeks out leaders who can help them mature personally. They may not want to be a leader, but they do seek to be a better person.
- The *Comrade* is a follower who desires to be part of something bigger than herself/himself. This individual wants to be part of a team or group who is working toward a common goal. They seek the intimacy and social support that comes with being part of a collective working toward a goal.
- The *Loyalist* follows due to a sense of duty or obligation to a leader. This individual may follow a leader from one organization to another if the

leader changes jobs. The loyalist's motivations are similar to that of a comrade, but the loyalist enjoys the one-on-one relationship with the leader they choose to follow, as opposed to being part of a group. They follow not for the opportunity for personal growth, but because they are committed to that individual.

- The *Dreamer* is a follower who is committed to following their personal dreams more than following a particular leader. Since their dream is the focus, their role as a follower or leader is less important. They may choose to follow a particular leader because of the message the leader imparts or because they embody a desired cause or idea. For the dreamer the leader is secondary.
- The *Lifeway* path to being a follower is selected out of a desire to help and serve others and followership is a way of life. In some instances someone who has chosen this path may decide that more can be accomplished by complementing a leader and their talents, than by competing with them to be the leader.

**Follower typologies.** Followers can take different paths to being a follower and they can be a follower in different ways as well. Kellerman (2008) notes that although differences among leaders are commonly discussed, the same is not typically true of followers who have typically been presented as a monolithic group. Just like there are different types of leaders, there are different types of followers. Various authors have developed follower typologies to highlight the differences between followers, typically exploring how they interact with their leader. For example Chaleff (2009); Kelley (1992);

Kellerman (2008); and Zaleznik (1965) provide different ways of categorizing the behaviors of followers. These four typologies will be discussed in more detail later in this section.

Each follower typology typically has different dimensions on which they measure how an individual demonstrates followership and in each typology there is usually, but not always, an optimal type of follower. Many of the follower typologies which exist today, such as the ones cited above, are based on the experience of those in corporate America (Kellerman, 2008). Despite the limited inclusion of perspectives on followers from other organizational entities, these typologies are useful because it is important to understand a person's follower style (Chaleff, 2009). By understanding one's follower style the individual can, if necessary, take steps to move toward a more optimal follower style and enhance one's ability to contribute to her/his organization or complete necessary tasks. Additionally, an awareness of follower styles allows leaders to determine how best to work with their followers so that the latter can optimize their contribution to the success of the organization and/or the leader.

Zaleznik (1965) authored a pioneering work in the study of followers, although he referred to them as subordinates. Kellerman (2008) notes "He was the first among the experts in leadership and management to point out that followers were important, that there were distinctions to be made among them, and that these distinctions mattered both in theory and practice" (p. 77). Based on some of the terms and descriptions that Zaleznik uses in his model, it appears to be grounded in a psychological approach to analyzing the behavior of followers or subordinates in organizations. As with many follower typologies his model includes two dimensions, or trends as he labeled them. The first dimension is the continuum of dominance and submission and it measures the extent to which a person wishes to be in control or controlled by their superiors. The second dimension is the continuum of activity and passivity and it assesses to what extent an individual wishes to initiate action or do nothing within an organization. In Zaleznik's model, these two dimensions intersect to produce four types of subordinates: Impulsive, Compulsive, Masochistic, and Withdrawn, which will be discussed briefly below.

- The *Impulsive* subordinate is seen as rebellious and as an individual who likes to challenge authority. Although this subordinate can have a negative impact on an organization, they can also have a positive impact if they use their impulsive nature to constructively assert their opinions on issues impacting the organization.
- The *Compulsive* subordinate seeks to control others, but they do so through passive means. According to Zaleznik (1965), these individuals often feel guilty about their desire to control others, are indecisive, and deny responsibility for their actions.
- The *Masochistic* subordinate wants to submit and be controlled by an authority figure. In certain organizations, this type of subordinate might be prone to injuring themselves as a way to seek the attention and empathy of others, as well as to have their actions subject to more control by others. This individual may also be more apt to make mistakes in their work that invite criticism from their superiors They have a tendency to champion the cause of the "underdogs" who they see as having little influence in an organization.

- The *Withdrawn* subordinate, as the name implies, is an individual who focuses inward and does not demonstrate interest about the work they do or the organization. This individual lacks trust and interest and as a result is not easily influenced by superiors. When this type of subordinates do their work, they will generally do the bare minimum required. Although this individual may not be happy with the state of their career, he/she is not likely to leave their current organization and may even give favorable evaluations of the organization and their superiors.

As an example of Zaleznik's (1965) psychological perspective, he suggests that the withdrawn subordinate may have had a father who was passive and withdrawn and a mother who was hostile.

Kelley (1992) proposes that there are two dimensions on which followers can be evaluated: independent/critical thinking and engagement. With regard to the first dimension, in Kelley's model followers should optimally demonstrate independent and critical thinking. These individuals are viewed by others as being able to think for themselves and are considered to be innovative. On the opposite send of the continuum are those followers who are dependent and do not demonstrate critical thinking. These individuals are seen as needing direction. With regard to the second dimension, in Kelley's model followers optimally should be actively engaged in their organization. They need to be able to take initiative and go beyond the requirements of their position as they contribute to the organization. On the opposite end of the continuum are those followers who are seen as lazy, passive, and in need of regular supervision.

Kelley (1992) developed a follower typology that posits five types of followers: Alienated, Passive, Conformist, Pragmatist, and Exemplary. The ideal follower in Kelley's model is the exemplary follower. According to the model if a person is not an exemplary follower, he/she can become one by taking specific actions, regardless of the type of followership they currently demonstrate. Kelley created *The Followership Questionnaire* which consists of 20 questions, in order to evaluate the type of follower style an individual demonstrates. Kelley's follower styles are discussed briefly below.

The *Alienated* follower scores high on independent and critical thinking and low on active engagement. This follower sees themselves as being the "Devil's advocate" within a group and acting as the conscience for their organization. However, they are viewed by others as cynical, headstrong, and adversarial. According to Kelley (1992), these followers were often once exemplary followers, but something happened to change their approach. Sometimes this happens because a leader or an organization has changed goals to ones that are not supported by the follower, or because the follower has expectations that are not being met by the leader.

The *Passive* follower scores low on both independent and critical thinking and active engagement in Kelley's (1992) model. This follower type believes they should only take action when directed and that they should rely on the judgment of their leader. This follower's peers likely view her/him as not doing her/his fair share of the work and requiring a great deal of supervision. Often people who demonstrate this follower style have leaders who are controlling and do not allow their followers to make decisions on their own (Kelley). They may also be individuals who do not want to be in a follower role and choose to deal with their dissatisfaction by doing the bare minimum.

The *Conformist* rates low on independent and critical thinking and high on active engagement. They view themselves as being a team player and helping to minimize conflict within the organization (Kelley, 1992). However, they may be viewed by others as lacking their own ideas and being averse to conflict. As with passive followers, conformists may have leaders who are controlling and or domineering (Kelley). They may also be part of an organization which encourages conformity through rigid rules and structures which dictate how members of the organization perform required tasks.

The *Pragmatic* follower scores in the middle on both independent and critical thinking and active engagement. This type of follower views herself/himself as being able to get things done within their organization and being attentive to changes in organizational politics (Kelley, 1992). Others may view this individual as someone who follows the letter of the rules rather than the spirit, and as someone who plays politics. Pragmatic followers are often individuals who are risk averse, although they want to do a good job. Their pragmatism may be how they cope with an organizational environment that may seem unstable.

The *Exemplary* follower is the ideal type of follower in Kelley's (1992) model. This follower scores high on both independent and critical thinking and on active engagement. This individual is viewed as an independent thinker who is willing to challenge leaders when needed. They are considered to be actively engaged and willing to use their talents for the benefit of the organization, even in the face of challenges. They are considered to be very competent and willing to go beyond the requirements of their position. According to Kelley, the exemplary follower has the ability to add value to their organization, which they demonstrate through their job related skills, their ability to nurture and leverage organizational relationships, and the presence of a "courageous conscience" which guides them as they perform their job and maintain relationships within their organization. Chaleff (2009) builds upon this concept of a "courageous conscience" in his model of the courageous follower, which will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

Unlike some of the other typologies mentioned above, Kellerman (2008) approaches the issue of follower types from the perspective of a political scientist. Also, unlike the previously mentioned typologies, Kellerman has only one dimension on which to determine a follower's type: engagement. In her model there are five types of followers: Isolate, Bystander, Participant, Activist, and Diehard and she does not identify which one is preferred.

The *Isolate* is an individual who is completely detached (Kellerman, 2008). They are very alienated and as a result they do not care about their leader and they know nothing about them. Within an organization these individuals will do their job, albeit without much enthusiasm. Despite their detachment they still have an impact on their organization by their de facto support of the status quo and the leader. Isolates may become more engaged if there are efforts to identify the source of their detachment, although this is not possible in all instances (Kellerman, 2007).

The *Bystander* is similar to the Isolate in that they are not very engaged, but unlike the Isolate, they make a deliberate choice to just observe and not be involved within their organization (Kellerman, 2008). The Bystander is aware of what is going on around them. This type of follower may go in a certain direction if it is in their best interest, but they are generally not interested in being engaged. As with the Isolate, it is possible to enhance the level of engagement of the *Bystander* by identifying the reason for their alienation and offer incentives to become engaged (Kellerman, 2007).

The *Participant* is somewhat engaged and invested in their organization and/or the leader, although their engagement is not always positive (Kellerman, 2008). This type of follower's engagement can manifest itself as support or opposition for an organization and/or its leader. Participants are coveted by leaders if they are supportive, but if they are working in opposition to the leader they can present problems for the organization (Kellerman, 2007).

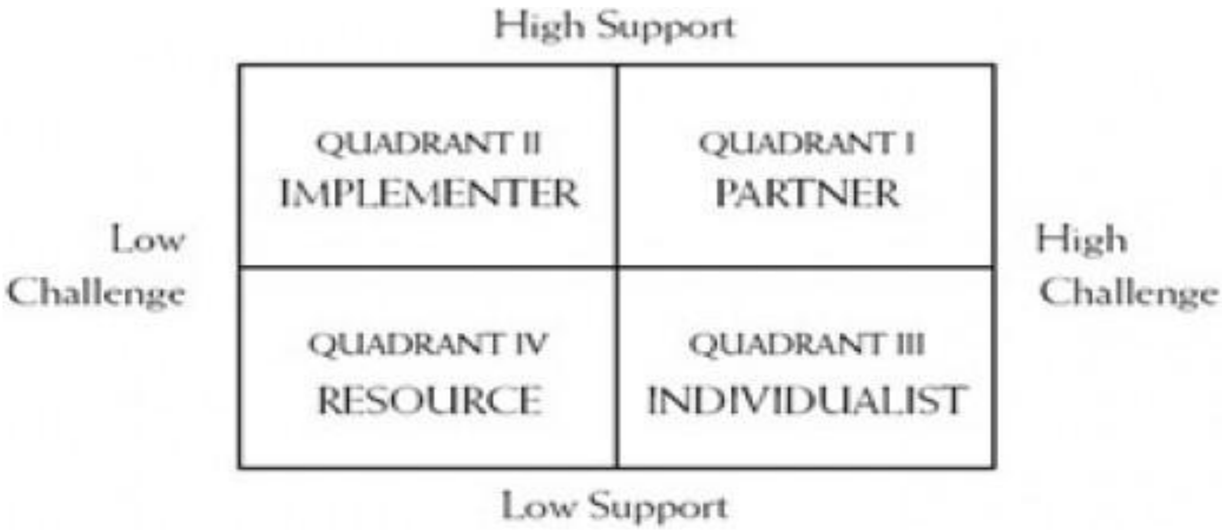
The *Activist* has strong feelings about their leader and are seen as energetic and eager (Kellerman, 2008). They are heavily invested in their leader and/or the organization, which can propel them to work hard to support their leader or to oppose them. When the Activist supports their leaders; they are allies and are often part of a leader's inner circle. However, such followers are in short supply in organizations due to the level of time and energy necessary to maintain this level of engagement (Kellerman, 2007).

The *Diehard* may be willing to put their life and physical wellbeing at risk for a cause in which they believe, and in some instances they may even be literally willing to die for a strongly held belief (Kellerman, 2007). The object of their very strong belief can be an individual, an idea, or both (Kellerman, 2008). This type of follower will either be deeply devoted to their leader or very motivated to remove them from power, using whatever means may be necessary (Kellerman, 2008). This type of follower is rare and the level of commitment that they demonstrate typically emerges only in dire situations (Kellerman, 2007). Diehards can take many forms, including suicide bombers and soldiers (Kellerman, 2008). They may also take the form of those dedicated to advancing civil rights, such as those who helped to register voters in the southern United States during the 1960s.

Chaleff (2009) presents a follower typology in which there are four types of followers: Partner, Individualist, Resources, and Implementer. The ideal follower within this typology is the Partner. According to Chaleff, even if an individual is a Partner, there is still room for improvement as they move toward demonstrating the five behaviors he considers critical to being a “Courageous Follower.” More details about the Courageous Follower model and the specific behaviors that Chaleff asserts are necessary to be considered one will be discussed in Chapter Three.

In Chaleff’s (2009) model of followership there are two dimensions which will help to determine a person’s follower style. The first dimension is “challenge.” A follower’s style is partially determined by the extent to which they are willing to challenge the behavior of the leader or policies if they seem to undermine the organization’s purpose and values. The second dimension is “support.” A follower’s style is partially determined by the degree to which the follower supports a leader. These two dimensions form a four quadrant model of followership based on where a person falls on the two dimensions (see Figure 1). Below are descriptions of each of Chaleff’s (2009) four follower styles.

*Figure 1.* Courageous Follower styles. (Chaleff, 2009, p. 40).




*The Partner* (Quadrant I) is a follower who displays high support and high challenge (Chaleff, 2009). This is an individual who strongly supports their leader, but is also willing to question their behavior or policies when needed. Those who exhibit this follower style may be described as risk takers and mission driven. In addition, they may be known to confront sensitive issues and are said to complement the perspectives of their leader.

*The Implementer* (Quadrant II) displays high support, but low challenge (Chaleff, 2009). This is an individual who the leader can count on to perform her/his job without much oversight. However, this individual is also generally unlikely to confront a leader if he/she is heading in the wrong direction or to pursue the issue if initial attempts to confront the leader are rejected. This type of follower might be described as dependable, team oriented, compliant, and respectful of authority.

*The Individualist* (Quadrant III) is a follower who displays low support and high challenge (Chaleff, 2009). This is an individual who does not shy away from telling the leader what they think of their actions or policies. However, this individual does not display the type of support for their leader and their initiatives for which leaders are typically seeking. This type of follower might be described negatively as confrontational, irreverent, and self-marginalizing. They might also be viewed positively as a reality checker within their organization.

*The Resource* (Quadrant IV) is the follower who displays low support and low challenge (Chaleff, 2009). This is the individual who does not go beyond the minimum required to perform their job. In many instances there are often reasons for their low support and challenge, including other obligations which prevent them from contributing more fully in the work environment. This type of follower might be described as uncommitted and merely "present." Additionally they are often considered to be individuals who avoid the attention of authority figures.

The four follower typologies described above have several similarities and differences. As previously noted, nearly all of them except Kellerman's (2008) are grounded in experiences in a corporate context, whereas Kellerman approaches the topic from a political science perspective. Kelley (1992) and Chaleff (2009) each have an optimal or ideal follower style in their typology. In Kelley's model this is the Exemplary follower, and in Chaleff's model it is *The Partner.* Although it is not clearly stated in Kellerman's model, *The Activist* could be considered the preferred type of follower. Whereas most of the follower typologies include follower styles that would be desired and those which would be discouraged, all of Zaleznik's (1965) subordinancy styles are ones that indicate dysfunction and should be avoided. Each of the follower typologies cited include followers who seem to be removed or distant from the organization or leader. This would include *The Alienated Follower* (Kelley), *The Individualist* (Chaleff), *The Bystander* and *The Isolate* (Kellerman) and *The Withdrawn Subordinate* (Zaleznik).

Of the various typologies, Chaleff's (2009) and Kelley's (1992) are the most alike in that each of the styles in Chaleff's model has a similar style in Kelley's model that shared common attributes. However, *The Pragmatist* in Kelley's model does not have a similar style in Chaleff's model. All of the typologies, except Kellerman's, essentially have two continua which are used to determine the follower style. For the models that have two continua, Chaleff's and Zaleznik's (1965) seem to focus on the relationship between the follower and their leader or superior to a greater extent than is seen in Kelley's model. For example, Chaleff's model explores the extent to which a follower challenges and supports their leader, while Kelley's model explores the extent to which a follower is engaged in the organization and demonstrates independent and critical thinking.

## Instruments Used to Enhance Organizational Success

One of the uses of instruments, such as the follower style assessments developed by Kelley (1992) or Chaleff (2009), is to assist organizations, such as corporations and higher education institutions, improve the ability of their employees to perform at an optimal level within the organization. Some organizations use instruments such as the *Clifton StrengthsFinder* (Asplund, Agrawal, Hodges, Harter, & Lopez, 2014) or the *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator* (CPP, 2014) to help enhance organizational success. A commonality of these various instruments is that they help an individual become more self-aware which can lead to improved performance for themselves, as well as their organization.

**Clifton StrengthsFinder**

The Clifton StrengthsFinder is an online tool intended to identify personal talents of individuals which can then be used to indicate where they have the greatest potential for building strengths (Asplund, Agrawal, Hodges, Harter, & Lopez, 2014). A primary intent of this assessment instrument is to focus on what an individual is good at, rather than to focus on where they are deficient. The instrument, which was initially introduced in 1999, currently uses 177 questions where an individual has to choose between two options (Asplund et al., 2014). The results shared with the individual who completes the assessment is a list of their top five talent themes, out of a total of 34. These top five themes, also called *Signature Themes*, are in rank order based on the intensity of the responses. There are more than 278,256 unique combinations of Signature Themes, if order is not taken into account, and more than 33 million permutations, if order is taken into account (Asplund et al., 2014). The instrument has been taken by more than 10 million people across the world and it has been used within organizations of various types, including higher education, to enhance employee engagement, productivity and to reduce turnover. There is evidence of positive results for employees and organizations when employees receive feedback about their strengths. For example, in one study turnover rates were 14.9% lower for employees who received feedback about their strengths when compared to those who did not (Asplund et al., 2014). Some organizations, such as the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities have used the Clifton StrengthsFinder to enhance employee engagement, as well as student success (R. Stubblefield, personal communication, August 3, 2014).

**Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI)**

The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) is considered the most commonly used personality instrument and it is estimated that more than 2 million people take the assessment annually (Cunningham, 2012). The MBTI is used to a great degree within the United States. It is used by more than 10,000 companies, including most members of the Fortune 500, by more than 2,500 colleges and universities, for both students and employees, and by more than 200 government agencies (Cunningham). The MBTI is based on the work of noted psychologist Carl Jung and was created in 1942 by Katherine Briggs and her daughter Isabel Briggs Myers to "…. enable individuals to grow through an understanding and appreciation of individual differences in healthy personality and to enhance harmony and productivity among diverse groups" (CPP, 2014). The instrument uses four dichotomies, each of which is symbolized by a letter, to place individuals into one of 16 personality types (Nottingham, 1998). The dichotomies and the associated letters used to depict them are as follows (CPP, 2014; Nottingham):

- *Extraversion (E) and Introversion (I)* focuses on whether a person directs their energy outward toward other people or directs their energy inward toward themselves and their thoughts and experiences.
- *Sensing (S) and Intuition (N)* focuses on whether a person uses information garnered through their experiences and five senses or information based on impressions and hunches.
- *Thinking (T) and Feeling (F)* focuses on whether a person uses objectivity and logic to make decisions or whether they rely primarily on personal values and the impact that their decisions will have on others.

- *Judging (J) and Perceiving (P)* focuses on whether a person prefers structure and plans versus whether they prefer to be spontaneous and flexible.

An individual who takes the MBTI would receive a four letter result (e.g., INFP, ESTJ), which would be accompanied by a thorough description of their personality type and its implications. Individuals can also receive more detailed reports, which discuss their personality type in the context of specific areas such as styles of decision-making, communication, stress management, and conflict (CPP, 2014a). This information can be used by the individual to become more self-aware of their personality as it relates to their work within an organization and their ability to optimize the work they do with others.

In addition for the ability for an individual to receive an individual report about their personality type, an organization can receive a report which summarizes the personality types of their employees and provides recommendations for enhancing organizational functioning. (CPP, 2014a).When groups of members within an organization, including their leader, are aware of their individual and collective personality type(s) this awareness can help to enhance the ability of individuals with different types to work more effectively together (Cunningham, 2012). The MBTI has been used to help organizations enhance team development by identifying communication styles among team members, improving skills to identify sources of conflict, and helping to guide individuals with regard to career choice and development (CPP, 2014a). The MBTI has also been used to help leaders develop a better understanding of their personality type so that they can be better managers, give higher quality feedback to members of their team, and improve the performance of both individuals and teams.

## Changing Environment of Student Affairs

At institutions across the United States, student affairs and the way that student affairs departments are organized has been impacted by several changes in the higher education environment. Enrollment among traditional students has increased, as well as among those who have been traditionally underrepresented in higher education, including students with disabilities, older-than-average students, and students from a wider range of socio-economic backgrounds (Kuk, 2012a). In addition to contending with a larger number of students and a more diverse student body, student affairs professionals must also serve a population that has greater needs with regard to mental health, chemical health, and experiences with interpersonal violence (Kuk, 2012a). Students have come to rely on technology to a greater degree than ever before, and their experience with technology has impacted their expectations about service and service delivery at the institutions they attend (Kuk, 2012a). There are also increasing demands for accountability from accrediting bodies at the national and regional level, which have implications for student affairs (Tull & Rammell, 2012). Student affairs professionals are charged with providing a supportive environment for the students who attend their institutions, but they must do so often with fewer resources (Romano, Hanish, Phillips, & Waggoner, 2010). Increasing enrollments, demands for new services, and decreases in funding at the state and federal levels have created a challenging time for student affairs organizations. Taken together, these internal and external forces are reshaping student affairs organizational structures at some institutions.

Student affairs organizations have evolved over time since the early days of the profession when an individual or small group of individuals were tasked with addressing student needs outside of the classroom, including responding to disciplinary issues, maintaining student records, and providing vocational and career guidance (Nuss, 2003; Rhatigan, 2000). It was not until the 1960s that the complex, independent student affairs organizations that exist today first appeared (Kuk & Banning, 2009). As enrollments increased, so did the demand for services. New units were added to existing student affairs portfolios to meet emerging needs, and little emphasis was placed on to what extent the organizations were effectively meeting the needs of students and supporting the institution's mission (Kuk & Banning 2009; Manning, Kinzie, & Schuh, 2006). As student affairs organizations grew, so did specialization among the staff. Staff and units were rewarded for being experts in a specific area, rather than on their work across units (Kuk, 2012a). Such specialization is not unique to student affairs, but is common throughout higher education, most notably with regard to academic disciplines and departments (Kezar & Lester, 2009).

Today, most student affairs organizations are organized in a hierarchical manner with a number of units (and staff) with specialized functions, such as admissions, student health, student leadership development, and housing, ultimately reporting to a senior student affairs officer (Kuk & Banning, 2009). In many organizations there are also units which serve specific populations, such as students with disabilities, student veterans, first generation students, student parents, international students, students of color, and GLBT students. The challenge to serve more students with more services and fewer resources requires new ways of organizing student affairs, including creating more lateral collaboration among units, as advocated across higher education by Kezar and Lester (2009). In the opinion of organizational specialists, the organizational structure which exists in most student affairs units is not optimal for meeting the needs of a modern organization in a constantly changing environment (Kuk, Banning, & Amey, 2010).

## Today's College Student

As mentioned before, student affairs organizations have evolved, due in part to the changing needs of the students they serve. One area where there has been tremendous change has been with regard to the demographics of college students. At the undergraduate level, the student body in American higher education is more diverse than ever before, with regard to race and ethnicity, as well as gender. In 2010, for example, 61% of college students were white, 14% were Black, 13% were Hispanic, and 6% were Asian/Pacific Islander (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). This is a shift from 1976 when 83% of college undergraduates were White, 9% were Black, and 3% were Hispanic. With regard to gender, 57% of college students in 2010 were female (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). Females have not always been the majority of students in college, but since 1988 the number of women in college has exceeded the number of men (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

The experiences of college students both before coming to college and while enrolled also provide useful insight into today's undergraduate student body. Approximately 7% of incoming freshmen in 2012 reported frequently feeling depressed (Pryor, Eagan, Palucki Blake, Hurtado, Berdan, & Case, 2012). Approximately 30.4% reported frequently feeling overwhelmed by all they had to do during their senior year, and 52% frequently or occasionally failed to complete homework on time (Pryor, et al., 2012). Incoming freshmen were involved in a variety of activities, some school related and some not, which could contribute to their sense of being overwhelmed. For example, 49.2% reported working six or more hours per week, 28.5% reported volunteering three or more hours per week, and 65.8% reported studying or working on homework for three or more hours per week (Pryor, et al., 2012). Today's college students are making ample use of various student services. According to a survey of first-year students conducted in 2012, 17% of respondents reported occasionally or frequently using psychological services, 43% reported occasionally or frequently seeking study skills assistance, 44% reported occasionally or frequently using the writing center, and 10% reported occasionally or frequently using the disability resource center (Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA, 2013a).

There is evidence that the increase in the cost of higher education has impacted today's college students. In 2009, 69% of college students surveyed were working at jobs for pay, which was an increase from 1993, when 60% of students reported working for pay (Levine & Dean, 2012). Senior student affairs officers also report seeing an increase in various behaviors which suggest that students are being impacted by the cost of higher education. They report seeing increases in the number of students working more hours, taking a break from college with the intent of returning, and reducing their credit load (Levine & Dean, 2012). The cost of higher education on students in college is apparent in other ways as well. For example, in 2012, 41% of first-year students sought financial aid advising (Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA, 2013a). Approximately 78% of graduating seniors in 2012 were leaving college with debt, and 56% of those owed $20,000 or more (Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA, 2013b).

Today's college student is used to using "technology" (i.e., the Internet, social media, smart phones, etc.) on a daily basis to accomplish various tasks, which can have implications for student affair organizations, as well as higher education institutions as a whole. For example, 81.3% of incoming freshmen reported using the internet for research or homework, and 76.8% reported using social media at least one hour or more per week, with nearly 50.5% reporting using it for three or more hours per week (Pryor, Eagan, Palucki Blake, Hurtado, Berdan, & Case, 2012). Despite the tremendous use of social media and technology to communicate with others, there are concerns among senior student affairs officers that students are becoming less adept at in-person communication (Levine & Dean, 2012).

## The Emergence and Use of Specialist Positions in Student Affairs

In recent years some student affairs organizations have begun to adopt cross-organizational specialist positions in response to a changing and more challenging environment (Tull & Kuk, 2012). These positions are not focused on specific functions or populations as in years past. Senior Student Affairs Officers (SSAO) have begun hiring staff in the areas of fundraising, assessment, communication, budget management, and professional development and training in increasing numbers. Additionally, SSAO report adding positions such as an “assistant to,” and/or a “chief of staff” to their student affairs organizations (Bonner & Fleming, 2012; Mallory, Castillo Clark, & Shulz, 2012).

Cross-organizational specialist positions, such as those mentioned above, are intended to respond to emerging challenges and constraints by sharing resources and roles laterally across the student affairs organization (Kuk, 2012a). They provide several benefits, including fostering collaboration, enhancing staff excellence, and bringing new skill sets and backgrounds into the student affairs profession. Kezar and Lester (2009) assert that there is a need for increased lateral collaboration across institutions of higher education, which would include student affairs organizations. These positions can help make such collaboration possible as they are typically the only staff within student affairs organizations whose responsibilities require them to work with staff across the division, as opposed to within a functional area. These new positions provide opportunities for existing staff with the necessary skills and competencies to contribute to the student affairs profession in a different way (Kuk, 2012a). They also provide opportunities for individuals outside of the student affairs profession to enter the profession because they have the skills and competencies required by these emerging positions. However, it is not clear what the necessary skills and competencies are for some of these positions. The emergence of these positions results in the need to reconsider how professional development is conceptualized for and delivered to these professionals (Kuk, 2012c). Student affairs staff who are entering specialist positions may have unique needs, as do staff from outside of student affairs who begin working in this field for the first time.

The National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA), a professional organization within the student affairs profession, conducted a survey of SSAO which provides some insight into the extent to which specialist positions are used in the student affairs profession (Tull & Rammell, 2012). Two hundred and fifty SSAO who are voting delegates to NASPA and who represent institutions across a variety of institutional types, including public and private, religiously affiliated and secular, and four-year and two-year, responded to the survey. They were asked to indicate which specialist positions they had within their organization, at least 75% time, using a list provided. The types of positions included in the study were those focused on development, research and assessment, technology, communications and outreach, human resources and professional development, auxiliary services, in addition to positions such as the "assistant to/chief of staff."

As noted previously, the most common specialist position was the "assistant to/chief of staff" (Tull & Rammell, 2012). Among the SSAO surveyed, 34.6% indicated that they had an "Assistant to" or chief of staff position within their student affairs organization. Of those institutions with either of these two positions, 83.5% had an "Assistant to." These positions are most common at public four-year institutions, where 51.2% had an "Assistant to" and/or chief of staff position. The position is less common at private four-year institutions, where 29.8% of those surveyed had such a position. These positions were least common at community colleges where 8.3% reported them. Specialist positions tended to be more prevalent in public institutions in all instances.

The next most common specialist positions were auxiliary services management, technology, and research and assessment (Tull & Rammell, 2012). Auxiliary services managers existed at 23.1% of the institutions surveyed. Common responsibilities for these specialists include managing housing, student union, campus recreation, and dining facilities. According to the survey, 19.1% of SSAO reported having a person within their organization who was responsible for technology. Research and assessment was the fourth most common specialist position, existing in 16.3% of the schools surveyed. Common tasks for these positions included measurement of learning outcomes, long-range planning, and assessing retention and satisfaction.

The next most common specialist positions were development (13.1%), communications and outreach (11.1%), human resources (9.1%), and training (8.6%) (Tull & Rammell, 2012). Common tasks for development officers included annual campaigns, donor relations, and alumni relations and development. For those employed in communications and outreach positions, common tasks included coordinating media relations with external media, producing press releases, and editing annual reports and/or divisional newsletters. Human resources specialists performed a variety of tasks, including coordinating recruiting, hiring, payroll and performance evaluation across student affairs organizations. For those who were employed in training positions, common tasks included organizing new employee orientation, planning professional development opportunities, planning retreats, and coordinating resource libraries.

In addition to the types of positions cited above, a number of SSAO reported positions that were not on the list provided (Tull & Rammell, 2012). These positions provide some insight into the way that student affairs organizations respond to emerging issues and problems. Among the positions mentioned were directors of academic skills and learning, campus-community liaisons, civic-student outreach coordinators, and conference and event coordinators.

## Emergence of the Student Affairs Profession in the United States

In order to put into context the emerging use of specialist positions within student affairs we must step back and understand the emergence of the student affairs profession. The emergence of the field of student affairs within higher education in the United States is aligned with the evolution of higher education in the United States (Nuss, 2003; Rhatigan, 2000). Higher education in the U. S. was based on the German model, which considered the primary role of faculty to be training the student's mind (Nuss, 2003). Although students since the first colonial colleges were involved in various aspects of college life that are common features in American higher education today, such as living on campus and engaging in co-curricular activities, it was not until the late 19th Century when staff were hired specifically to address non-academic concerns of students (Rhatigan, 2000).

Relatively little attention was paid to how students spent their time outside of class during the 19th Century, although in the 1860s an increased emphasis on the health and physical activity of students developed (Nuss, 2003). This period of time also saw the passage of the first Morrill Act in 1862, which created the land-grant colleges and greatly expanded access to higher education (Rhatigan, 2000). The second Morrill Act of 1890 increased opportunities for African-Americans to attend college, and during this time there was an increase in the number of women seeking a higher education (Nuss, 2003). The increasing demands on college presidents during this time, coupled with an evolution in the role of faculty, lead to the hiring of staff to handle student problems, particularly disciplinary issues (Nuss, 2003). Previously these duties had been handled by the president and faculty.

In some ways the first “student affairs” staff person was hired in 1870 when Harvard appointed Professor Ephraim Gurney as its first college dean. In addition to teaching, his primary task was to relieve the president from his duties related to student discipline (Stewart, as cited in Nuss, 2003). During the late 1800s Charles Eliot, President of Harvard, advocated allowing students to choose electives, which was a drastic change from the prescribed classical curriculum (Nuss, 2003). This change required paying greater attention to student academic advising, which required additional staff. In 1891 Harvard appointed LeBaron Russell Briggs as dean, in part because of his affinity for working with students (Schwartz, 2003). Briggs was so popular that students would line up for hours in order to meet with him and seek his advice.

Over time, the senior administrators charged with attending to the needs of students outside of the classroom began to be referred to as Deans of Men or Deans of Women. Thomas Arkle Clark of Illinois is thought to be the first Dean of Men in 1909, although he may have had the duties longer than the actual title (Rhatigan, 2000). The first Dean of Women is thought to be Adelia Johnston from Oberlin, who in 1869 was the Lady Principal and became the Dean of Women in 1894, although Alice Freeman had the title beginning in 1892 at the University of Chicago (Blackburn, as cited in Rhatigan, 2000; Tuttle, as cited in Rhatigan, 2000).

The men and women who occupied these positions in the late 1800s and early 1900s did not have the benefit of defined job descriptions, professional training, or regular communication with peers on other campuses. Over a period of time, the responsibilities of these early student affairs professionals began to take shape and definitions of the work they did began to emerge. For example, in the eyes of some, the Dean of Men was:

> That officer in the administration who undertakes to assist the men students [to] achieve the utmost of which they are individually capable, through personal effort on their behalf, and through mobilizing in their behalf all of the forces within the University which can be made to serve this end. (Secretarial Notes, 1928, p. 37, as cited in Rhatigan, 2000).

According to Cloyd Heck Marvin, President of George Washington University, the Dean of Men was free to interpret his position since the primary role was to help students adapt successfully to constantly changing surroundings (Secretarial Notes, 1929, as cited in Rhatigan, 2000).

The responsibilities and roles of student affairs professionals became more clearly defined over time. In addition to focusing on issues related to student discipline, staff provided vocational guidance and began to use interest inventories to assist students in determining possible career choices (Nuss, 2003). By 1920, enough colleges and universities were providing student health services that the American Student Health Association was founded (Nuss, 2003). Around this time mental health issues also became a concern for those early student affairs professionals (Rhatigan, 2000). As institutions continued to respond to the growing needs of their students, many created a Dean of Students position, which often replaced the previous Dean of Men and Dean of Women roles. In most instances men, typically those who were previously the Dean of Men, were hired for these positions (Schwartz, 2003). During this time many Deans of Students were hired less for their ability to inspire and connect with students, as was the case with Dean Briggs at Harvard, and more for their administrative abilities (Rhatigan, 2000). A primary responsibility for the Dean of Students was helping to create a comprehensive suite of programs and services to serve students.

The 1950s, 1960s and 1970s saw a tremendous increase in federal involvement with higher education (Nuss, 2003). Following in the footsteps of the first and second Morrill Act, various laws, including the GI Bill, the Housing Act of 1950, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Higher Education Act of 1965, Title IX in 1972, and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 impacted higher education by creating additional access. These laws also facilitated the addition of new programs, services, and facilities, which in turn necessitated more staff and oversight. The responsibility of overseeing student affairs grew more complex and important to the success of the institution. In time, campuses created the position of Vice President for Student Affairs (Sandeen, 1991). Very often the title also included the role of Dean of Students. This elevation of this position to the vice presidential level was an indicator of the key role that student affairs played in the life of an institution. This title became more popular in the 1960s as student affairs played a larger role in responding to campus unrest and disruption (Rhatigan, 2000).

**The Changing Role of the Senior Student Affairs Officer (SSAO)**

The growing number of units which may comprise a student affairs organization has added to the complexity of student affairs administration (Dungy & Ellis, 2011; Tull & Kuk, 2012). Consequently, the role of the senior student affairs officer (SSAO) has evolved a great deal since the days of the first student affairs professionals and the men and women who served as deans of men or deans of women. Student affairs organizations have become complex organizations, due in part to the collection of units which they may include, the various sources of revenue which fund their operations, and the unique demands related to managing specific units, such as those with capital needs, including residence halls and student unions. As a result student affairs organizations require leaders with a variety of skills and abilities.

There are many expectations of today's SSAO identified in the literature, which include the opinions of experienced SSAO, scholars in the fields, as well as data from research studies. For example, they need to be skilled at legislative advocacy and technology according to several sitting SSAO (Moneta & Jackson, 2011; Pennington, 2011). They are expected to be skilled at assessment and respond to demands for increased accountability by demonstrating student learning and outcome achievement to accreditation bodies and state legislatures (Sandeen & Barr, 2006). They are viewed as key institutional officers who provide valuable perspective and leadership on institutional issues and priorities, as noted by current practitioners Ellis (2011) and Snyder (2011). They are expected to collaborate with academic affairs to advance student learning, as well as with other campus partners to create an environment which supports a student body that is increasing in diversity and facilitate the ability of students to become leaders in a multicultural world (Sandeen & Barr, 2006). They must also help foster environments where international students can thrive, where interaction between domestic and international students is encouraged, and where students can develop global competencies (Montoya & Wais, 2011). They must be able to address the growing needs of a student body with regard to issues such as alcohol and mental health (Kuk, 2012a).

Given the recent economic challenges that face the nation, including institutions of higher education, it is critical that SSAO be able to effectively manage budgets in an increasingly complex environment where competition for financial resources is becoming more fierce. This view is held by current SSAO, such as Moneta and Jackson (2011), as well as by researchers, such as Stewart and Williams (2010), following a qualitative study of SSAO on fiscal responsibilities and professional preparation. The successful SSAO needs strong financial acumen given the current challenging and complex environment in which they must operate (Stewart & Williams, 2010). They need to be able to secure resources for their division in a competitive environment, in addition to being able to understand financial terminology, budget systems and core budgeting constructs.

As student affairs organizations have evolved, they have become more complex with regard to their units, and as a result their funding sources. Although there are differences based on institutional type and size, most student affairs organizations are funded by at least one or more sources of revenue, including operational funds provided by the institution; auxiliary funding from student affairs units which generate revenue, such as housing, food services and bookstores; fees which are imposed on students, and private support from fundraising or grant writing efforts (Keppler, 2010; Varlotta, 2010). Depending on the nature of the student affairs division, an SSAO may have to oversee several budgets, including an operations budget which provides funding for the day-to-day operation of the division, a capital budget which provides funding for capital improvements and maintenance of facilities, such as residence halls, recreational centers, and student unions, and a reserve fund which is used to address unexpected expenses (Varlotta, 2010).

Higher education in general and student affairs organizations in particular have been impacted greatly by the economic challenges of the past few years (Romano, Hanish, Phillips, & Waggoner, 2010; Stewart & Williams, 2010). This is especially true for student affairs organizations within public institutions. Student affairs divisions across the nation have had to determine how to continue to serve, with fewer resources, the ever increasing needs of their students and key stakeholders. In responding to a new financial reality organizations have been guided by their mission and values, as well as those of their institution (Romano, et al., 2010). A qualitative study by Romano, et al. (2010), explored the experiences of SSAO from 12 public institutions which weathered persistent budget reductions over an eight-year period beginning in the late 1990s. The study identified strategies used by various institutions to manage declining resources, as well as lessons learned from the process.

The SSAO in Romano, Hanish, Phillips, and Waggoner's study (2010) used a variety of strategies to address budget challenges, including reorganizing and merging units, eliminating positions left vacant by attrition, reducing professional development funding, eliminating salary increases for a year or more, increasing the use of student employees or graduate assistants, outsourcing services, increasing student fees, and transferring staff expenditures from operations budgets to auxiliary budgets. Keppler (2010) cites many of these strategies in an exploration of how student affairs divisions can reduce costs and/or generate revenue during tough budgetary times. In addition those discussed by Romano, et al. (2010), Keppler (2010) includes delaying facility improvements, increasing fundraising efforts, and partnering with other institutions to provide services.

As demonstrated above, the role of the SSAO is increasingly more complex than it was in the past. This complexity necessitates an exploration of their role, as well as the staff and organizational structures they employ to carry out their various duties and obligations. This complexity includes specialist positions, such as the "Assistant to."

**Foundational Student Affairs Documents**

The core values and approach of the student affairs profession have been shaped in part by the work of early practitioners, but mostly by one document published in 1937: *The Student Personnel Point of View* (National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, 1989). *The Student Personnel Point of View* was created when the American Council on Education gathered a group of influential educators who were interested in the increasing number of programs and services focused on student life outside of the classroom (Rhatigan, 2000). A core component of this document was the notion that educational institutions must attend to the needs of the "whole student" (National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, 1989). The document advises that institutions consider a student's intellectual capacity, emotional make-up, physical condition, social relationships, vocational aptitudes, morals and religious values, economic resources and aesthetic appreciation. *The Student Personnel Point of View* was revised in 1949 in response to major changes in higher education which resulted from the GI Bill following the end of World War II (Rhatigan, 2000). Among the changes were establishing new goals, including educating for the fuller realization of democracy and enhancing understanding and cooperation (National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, 1989).

While the original and revised version of *The Student Personnel Point of View* are considered seminal documents in the student affairs profession, in the 1990s and 2000s there were additional publications which have greatly impacted the field. These would include the *Student Learning Imperative* (American College Personnel Association, 1994), *Principles of Good Practice for Student Affairs* (American College Personnel Association & National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, 1997), *Powerful Partnerships: A Shared Responsibility for Learning* (Joint Task Force on Student Learning, 1998), *Learning Reconsidered* (National Association of Student Personnel Administrators & American College Personnel Association, 2004) and *Learning Reconsidered 2* (Keeling, 2006). All of these documents expanded on the foundation of *The Student Personnel Point of View* by advocating for a campus-wide commitment to student learning, highlighting the role that student affairs, in partnership with academic affairs, plays in the educational process.

**Student Affairs Values and Professional Standards**

Several values are inherent in student affairs practice. These values guide the work of professionals in the field, and help to attract new professionals to the field (Taub & McEwen, 2006). Researchers have identified these values by studying historical documents, reviewing practices, and surveying practitioners, and they can be divided into several categories, including those which relate to the individual, context, and caring (Young, 2003). Individual values would include growing human dignity, focusing on the whole student and recognizing that individuals are unique and are responsible for their development. Contextual values include the notion of community, equality, and justice. Caring is a core value of student affairs, as is the notion of providing services to students, and assisting students to care about society.

As the student affairs profession matured, so did the need for professional standards for program development, evaluation, and accreditation. Several student affairs professional associations met in 1979 to begin discussing how such standards might be created (Nuss, 2003). The outcome of these discussions was the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) which is a consortium of member organizations with a mission focused on promoting the improvement of programs and services to enhance the quality of student learning and development" (Council for the Advancement of Standards, n.d.). Member organizations include the American College Personnel Association (ACPA), the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA), ASPA, the National Association of International Educators (NAFSA), the Association of College Unions International (ACUI), and the National Council for Student Development (NCSD). The first CAS standards were published in 1986 and they have been revised several times since then, with the most recent update in

2012. Revisions can include changes to existing standards, as well as the addition of new ones. Among the functional areas that were either revised or new in the 2012 revisions are Career Services; Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Programs and Services; Sexual Assault and Relationship Violence Prevention Programs; and Veterans and Military Programs and Services (See Appendix A for a list of functional areas included in the CAS Standards) (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, 2012). The standard for each functional area begins with a *CAS Standards Contextual Statement*, which provides contextual information about the functional area, followed by the standards which include guidance regarding the area's mission, program elements, ethical standards, as well as needs in the areas of human resources, technology, and facilities and equipment, in addition to other suggestions.

**Student Affairs Professional Organizations**

The development of professional organizations within student affairs is aligned with the development of the field itself, with the earliest organizations founded in the 1900s (Nuss, 2000). The early professional organizations in student affairs were separated by gender and race, which followed the organization of the field at that time, as well as the divisions which existed in society (Nuss, 2003). Examples of these organizations include the National Association of Deans and Advisers of Men, founded in 1919, and the National Association of Deans of Women and Advisers of Girls in Colored Schools, founded in 1929 (Nuss, 2003). Racial discrimination led to the creation of professional organizations for African-Americans in student affairs. African-American student affairs deans were unable to attend professional conferences that were held in segregated hotels or restaurants (Nuss, 2003). In 1954 the National Association of Deans of Women and Advisers of Girls in Colored Schools and the National Association of the Deans of Men in Negro Educational Institutions met to create the National Association of Personnel Workers (Nuss, 2003). The name of this group was changed to the National Association of Student Affairs Professionals in 1994 and it still exists today.

During the early days of the emerging student affairs profession, the Dean of Women was often the highest ranking woman on campus at co-ed institutions and some of them desired to connect and collaborate with other women administrators to discuss job-related issues (Sturdevant & Hayes, as cited in Nuss, 2003). In 1910, during a meeting of the American Association of University Women, a group of Deans of Women gathered and decided that it would be useful to have their own organization, and in 1916 the National Association of Deans of Women was organized (Nuss, 2000). This group still exists today, but it is now the National Association of Women in Education, which reflects its current scope and focus.

Currently within student affairs, there are two primary professional organizations: the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) and the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) which are both actively involved in advancing the student affairs profession. Although both organizations have international members, most of their members are from the United States. NASPA has approximately 13,000 members and ACPA has approximately 7,500 members (American College Personnel Association, n.d.; National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, n.d.). In 2009 both organizations explored combining into one professional organization to better serve the profession (Grasgreen, 2011). In order for the two organizations to consolidate two-thirds of their respective membership would have to vote “yes”. More than 80% of ACPA members voted for consolidation, but only 62% of NASPA members voted in favor of consolidation, just missing the two-thirds threshold (Grasgreen, 2011).

Both NASPA and ACPA have their roots in organizations founded in the early part of the 20th Century. NASPA's origins began in 1919 when a meeting was held at the University of Wisconsin that has been referred to as the Conference of Deans and Advisers of Men (Nuss, 2000). This meeting is recognized as the founding of the National Association of Deans and Advisers of Men, which became the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators in 1951. Although the name of this group eliminated "Men" from the title in 1951, it was not until the period between 1965 and 1975 that women began to participate actively and hold office within NASPA (Nuss, 2003). ACPA was created in 1924 when it was called the National Association of Appointment Secretaries (NAAS) (Nuss, 2000). Appointment secretaries were responsible for placing teachers and other college graduates in jobs. The NAAS held its first meeting in 1924, which was held jointly with the National Association of Deans of Women. In 1931 the organization adopted its current name.

While NASPA and ACPA both have members from across the student affairs profession, there are also professional organizations in the field which bring people together based on their area of specialization. Increasing specialization led to the formation of professional organizations which focus on discrete functional areas. These include the Association of College and University Housing Officers (founded in 1952), the National Orientation Directors Association (founded in 1947), the American College Health Association (founded in 1920), and the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (founded in 1968) (Nuss, 2000).

Professional organizations perform several important roles within a profession, which is true for the student affairs profession. For example, they provide opportunities to connect with colleagues in the profession and to gain new perspectives on pertinent issues as a result (Nuss, 2000). Professional associations assist with ongoing professional development and help to orient new professionals to the field. They also help to influence the direction of the profession and to shape professional standards, such as those developed by CAS. ACPA and NASPA recently developed a comprehensive list of competencies for student affairs professionals (American College Personnel Association & National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, 2010). These competencies will be discussed in more detail later.

The work of professional associations is conducted in various ways (Nuss, 2000). For example, many professional associations have peer-reviewed journals which allow scholars in the field to share their research. Professional associations typically host annual conferences which provide opportunities for members to present and attend educational sessions, and often provide specialized educational opportunities for members with particular interests. As noted previously, there are many professional organizations within the student affairs field and they operate in the same fashion as professional organizations in other fields.

## Student Affairs Organizational Structures

In order to fully explore the issue of specialist positions in student affairs organizations, understanding the organizational structure of student affairs is critical. Student affairs functions are organized differently across higher education, and no one model fits all institutions (Sandeen & Barr, 2006). The typical student affairs structure is a collection of functional units which report to a senior student affairs officer who has a title such as Vice President for Student Affairs or Dean of Students. According to Kuk and Banning (2009), there is not an identifiable pattern with regard to which units are part of student affairs organizations at various institutions and which units are not. Other models for organizing student affairs include offering services such as orientation, academic advising, and career counseling at the academic unit level, or a hybrid model where some services are offered at the collegiate level and some services, such as admissions, health services, and financial aid are provided by a central unit (Sandeen & Barr, 2006). Each model has benefits and challenges and their effectiveness depends in part on the needs and culture of the institution (Manning, Kinzie, & Schuh, 2006).

In addition to focusing on the units within a student affairs organization, another way of examining student affairs organizations is to explore where student affairs reports as an entity within an institution. A centralized student affairs division which reported to the president became the most common model after 1965 (Sandeen, 1991). Currently, in addition to the model where student affairs reports directly to the president, it is becoming more common to have student affairs report to the senior academic officer or provost (Dungy, 2003). According to one study, 64% of the 28 SSAO who responded from public and private research universities indicated that student affairs reported to a provost (Kuk & Banning, 2009).

Since its early days, student affairs organizations have continued to add programs and services to respond to evolving student needs. The constant evolution of student affairs organizations is demonstrated by the changing number of functional areas contained in the CAS standards. There were standards for 19 functional areas in the first

CAS standards published in 1986 and the 2001 version had 29 (Nuss, 2003). The 2006 version had 34 and there are currently 43 in the 2012 version (Council for the Advancement of Standards, n.d.). These functional areas include admissions, housing, counseling, LGBTQ services, and sexual assault and relationship violence programs.

The evolution of student affairs organizations and the corresponding lack of concern about the organizational structure are reflected in the lack of research in this area (Kuk & Banning, 2009). According to Kuk and Banning (2009) there is little research about the type of student affairs organizational structures that exist, the rationale for their design, and the role and purpose that their structure plays in achieving their goals and that of their institution. Ambler (2000) conducted a survey of more than 100 student affairs organizations at both public and private community colleges and four-year institutions. He examined many aspects of the student affairs organizations, including their services, organizational model and placement in the institutional structure. His findings supported the notion that student affairs programs and services had become large, comprehensive, and specialized across all institutional types.

Kuk and Banning (2009) attempted to address gaps in the literature about student affairs organizations by surveying SSAO about their current student affairs organizational structure, the reporting relationship within the institution, and the rationale and mechanism for their student affairs organizational structure. Respondents were also asked about changes made to their organizational structure, desired changes, and perceived constraints and limitations on changing their current structures. The survey was sent to 240 randomly selected SSAO representing research institutions, 4-year colleges, liberal arts schools, and community colleges. Ninety SSAO responded and the greatest percentage of responses came from comprehensive colleges and universities (35.6%) followed by research universities (31.1%), liberal arts colleges (20%) and community colleges (13.3%).

The majority of the SSAO respondents (76.6%) indicated that they redesigned some of the organizational structure of their student affairs organization, with most of the changes occurring shortly after assuming their new role (Kuk & Banning, 2009). In most instances the changes were modest, such as changing reporting lines or combining units. Reasons for changing their organizational structure included promoting teamwork and collaboration, enhancing efficiencies and effectiveness, and addressing financial concerns. Survey respondents also indicated changes they would like to make in their student affairs organizations (Kuk & Banning, 2009). These changes included creating assistant or associate vice president positions, reducing the number of direct reports to the SSAO, creating functional clusters, and bringing in units not currently part of student affairs. Barriers to making such changes included a lack of financial resources, current campus climate, and lack of sufficient staff. The nature of the changes made and desired by SSAO supports Kuk and Banning's (2009) finding that student affairs organizations are predominately organized by functional area and hierarchical. They noted a general trend for institutions of a similar type to be organized in similar fashions.

According to Tull and Kuk (2012), there are indications that student affairs organizations are moving toward new models of organizing due to a variety of external factors, although it appeared that responding to these factors did not determine how student affairs was organized according to the SSAO surveyed in Kuk and Banning's (2009) study. However, there were several institutions where functional clusters where used to organize student affairs and some larger organizations had adopted a “hybrid matrix” model. This model consists of “…a coordinating overlay placed on top of functional unit structure that serves to organize and coordinate shared services or programs” (Kuk & Banning, 2009, p. 100). This model is similar to an emerging model used by institutions which have begun to employ specialists, such as chiefs of staff or directors of human resources, within their student affairs organizations (Tull & Kuk, 2012).

Hybrid matrix structures combine the benefits of functional organizational structures, with one that allows for more collaboration and enhanced communication across units (Kuk, 2012b). Kezar and Lester (2009) argue that such organizational structures provide many benefits, including both horizontal and vertical connections among staff, and more opportunities for collective problem solving, sharing of information and interaction among units and staff. Additional benefits include the decentralization of decision making and a more efficient use of human and financial resources. Denison, Hart, and Kahn (1996) conducted a qualitative study of more than 200 individual and group interviews, written descriptions and team observations from multiple divisions and locations of one multinational American automobile company. They found that matrix structures can enhance an employee’s experience by increasing his/her level of responsibility and their involvement in decision making.

The student affairs profession has been well served by its preference for organizational structures based on function and hierarchy (Kuk, 2012b). These structures have enabled student affairs to respond to the changing needs of the student body and develop a constantly evolving suite of sophisticated programs and services. Additionally, these structures have enabled student affairs to do this with limited resources, although this organizational structure has come at a cost. Functional structures do not generally promote collaboration and vertical communication (Kuk, 2012b). These organizations do not encourage units to cross boundaries to share resources and address common problems, in part because they are focused on protecting their own identity and resources. As the context of higher education changes in the 21st century there is a need for greater collaboration (Kezar & Lester, 2009). The emergence of matrix structures within student affairs organizations is an example of how organizations can be redesigned to enhance collaboration.

Despite evidence from Tull and Kuk (2012) that many student affairs organizations are reorganizing in response to a changing environment, the changes reported and desired by SSAO, as noted in Kuk and Banning (2009), do not seem to indicate a movement away from traditionally organized student affairs organizations. Since there appears to be a movement of some organizations toward matrix structures within student affairs, Kuk and Banning (2009) recommend further exploration of these emerging student affairs organizations. Particular areas of inquiry could include to what extent these structures enhance organizational effectiveness and the ability of student affairs units to achieve their divisional and institutional goals and missions.

## Student Affairs Staff

In order to understand staff who work in student affairs specialty positions, we must understand how student affairs staff generally choose the profession, how they are prepared through formal education and professional development, and the skills necessary to perform their jobs. We must also explore the different types of staff within student affairs, particularly middle managers who have a number of characteristics similar to those in the “Assistant to” position.

**Pathways to the Student Affairs Profession**

There is a dearth of published research on the factors which influence the decision to pursue a career in student affairs (Taub & McEwen, 2006). The student affairs profession has been referred to as a “hidden profession” because so few individuals are aware of the field and because there is no undergraduate major which directly leads to graduate study in student affairs. Brown (as cited in Taub & McEwen, 2006) asserted that “…people enter student affairs careers by accident or quirk” (p. 5). According to a conference presentation given by Williams, McEwen, and Engstrom (as cited in Taub & McEwen, 2006) the influence of a mentor who was a student affairs professional was an important factor in a student’s decision to enter the field.

A qualitative study by Hunter (1992) identified six considerations that prompt shifts in the career plans of those who sought student affairs careers. These considerations include encouragement by those already in the field, “critical” incidents, values shared with student affairs professionals, others’ reactions to employment in student affairs, and a desire to improve campus life. Hunter’s study was based on information received from 93 graduate students who were enrolled in a student affairs master’s program between 1985 and 1989. Respondents were asked to provide a summary of their career path, and indicate how they selected student affairs as their career.

Most of the respondents in Hunter’s (1992) study (73%) indicated that someone at their undergraduate institution (typically residence life staff) either introduced them to the idea of working in student affairs and/or encouraged them to pursue this career path.

Hunter's findings were supported by Taub and McEwen's (2006) study of 300 master's degree students in 24 student affairs programs from across the nation. Taub and McEwen (2006) found that 80.3% of respondents reported being influenced and encouraged by specific people, including staff in residential life; central student affairs, including deans of students and SSAO; and student activities.

Hunter (1992) found that 79% of respondents mentioned incidents or experiences which were critical to their choosing a career in student affairs. The experience most common for these students was working in a residence hall and most of the incidents or experiences which occurred happened in a student's junior or senior year. This finding is consistent with Taub and McEwen's (2006) finding that 46% of respondents became aware of student affairs as a career during their junior or senior year. Taub and McEwen also found that 53.4% of respondents began thinking about student affairs as a career in their junior or senior year, while 35% began thinking about it after graduation. Hunter (1992) noted that 24% of respondents used words such as "accident," "odd fate," and "stumbled upon" to describe their decision to consider student affairs (p. 183). This finding reinforces the notion that people enter student affairs accidently, which is an illustration of Happenstance Learning Theory (Krumboltz, 2008) and its impact on career choice.

Another significant factor in the decision of some students to enter student affairs, according to Hunter (1992), was a feeling of congruence between their values and those of the profession. Approximately 36% of the respondents acknowledged that they were attracted to student affairs because they felt that the field's values and priorities, as espoused by the professionals they encountered, were aligned with their own. Hunter

(1992) also found that for some student affairs professionals, negative experiences as an undergraduate were a primary motivating factor for their career choice. Approximately 11% of the respondents in the study were motivated by a desire to create a better student experience for others than they had themselves.

**Preparation for the Student Affairs Profession**

Once someone decides to enter the student affairs profession, what is the most common way for preparing for a career in this field? A critical mass of student affairs professionals enter the field via formal master's and doctoral programs (Kuk, 2012c). These programs can trace their roots back to 1913 when the Teachers College at Columbia established a program of special training at the graduate level for "deans and advisors of women" (Lloyd-Jones, as cited in Kuk, 2012c). There are currently more than 100 master's level programs in the United States which prepare participants for various student affairs positions. These programs are key to socializing new professionals, as well as developing professional knowledge and competencies necessary to excel (Kuk & Cuyjet, 2009).

Although a master's degree in student affairs is a common credential held by many student affairs professionals, there are many individuals who enter the field without this specialized training (Kuk, 2012c). For example, staff who provide health care or mental health services have advanced degrees, but they are not from student affairs programs. Staff who work in units such as recreational sports will often have advanced degrees, but they are not always from student affairs programs. Additionally, as mentioned earlier, there are a number of emerging specialists roles within student affairs that require skills such as fundraising, marketing, and technology which are not commonly taught in student affairs preparation programs (Tull & Kuk, 2012).

Kuk (2012c) analyzed the program and curricular descriptions for 90 student affairs preparation programs that were listed in the NASPA graduate program directory to review the stated current focus of the programs, evaluate their mission statements, and examine their curricular descriptions for any indications of a change or future orientation. Kuk (2012c) found that most of the programs (67.5%) stressed student learning and development and/or administration. Almost all of the programs indicated that they complied with the CAS standards for professional preparation. About two-thirds of the mission statements were considered traditional and focused on preparing practitioners or scholar practitioners for traditional roles in student affairs, which would include educating participants in research and assessment, multi-cultural competencies and other skills. About a third of the mission statements included language which implied that they were preparing professionals to work in a changing environment or preparing them to be change agents, including some that emphasized collaborative relationships and partnerships. Only a few of the statements indicated that they were preparing participants for the future or indicated that the ability to innovate or adapt to change was part of the program's mission. When Kuk (2012c) examined the curricular descriptions for the various programs there was little evidence that courses focused on skills and competencies that are non-traditional, but important to student affairs staff in emerging roles. These would include grant writing, fund-raising, and marketing.

**Professional Development in Student Affairs**

Formal preparation programs are only one of the ways that student affairs professionals can learn the skills needed to excel in the profession. Professional development plays an important role in enabling student affairs staff to address emerging issues and to continue to develop new skill and knowledge bases (Schwartz & Bryan, 1998). Professional development in student affairs is typically delivered in one of several ways (Schwartz & Bryan, 1998). The most common method of delivery are programs offered by student affairs professional organizations such as NASPA or ACPA. These programs might include annual conferences, as well as specialized institutes and programs targeted at special areas of interest or at staff in specific types of positions. In some institutions, student affairs organizations organize professional development opportunities for their staff. However, most organizations do not have the resources, including time and expertise, to do this effectively (Kuk, 2013c).

In recent years there has been tremendous growth in the number of for-profit entities that offer professional development programs to student affairs professionals (Kuk, 2012c). Example of firms offering such programs include the National Center for Higher Education Risk Management, Studentaffairs.com, and the National Behavioral Intervention Team Association. Sometimes these programs are offered in concert with a professional organization or sometimes they are offered on a standalone basis. Very often these programs are offered via distance learning in the form of webinars. Although these professional development opportunities may be valuable to the participants, there are occasional concerns about the expertise and credentials of the individuals who are leading these opportunities, as well as the credibility of the information being presented (Kuk, 2012c). There are no agreed upon standards for credentialing the people or organizations providing the professional development experiences and potential participants must make judgment calls based on what they know about the reputation of the presenter or the sponsor.

As the student affairs profession continues to change, particularly with regard to emerging specialist positions, such as the “Assistant to,” it may be time for a different approach to preparing future professionals and for continuing their development. Graduate preparation programs need to become more future oriented and revise their curricula to address emerging competencies and skillsets. Kuk (2012c) suggests that these programs partner with professional organizations and provide ongoing professional development and curricular offerings in response to the changing nature of student affairs. Such a partnership could provide the expertise and credibility that is sometimes lacking in professional development opportunities, create a stronger connection between faculty and practitioners, and help to move theory to practice by enhancing the flow of information between faculty and practitioners.

**Skills Needed for Student Affairs Staff**

A significant body of literature exists regarding the skills, knowledge and personal traits necessary for successful student affairs administrators, although gaps do exist. For example, little research has explored these issues for specific student affairs positions, including traditional positions in functional areas, as well as emerging specialist positions. Lovell and Kosten (2000) performed a meta-analysis of empirically-based studies which explored the competencies, skills, or knowledge bases required for student affairs professionals, with the intent of identifying the characteristics that are necessary for successful student affairs administrators. The authors defined “success” broadly and stated that “At a minimum ‘success’ means identifying the skills, traits, or knowledge bases necessary to work as a student affairs administrator” (p. 554).

In order to conduct their study Lovell and Kosten (2000) identified articles written between 1967 and 1997 which included specific keywords, including “Student Affairs Personnel,” “Higher Education Student Development Personnel,” “Preparation of Student Affairs Professionals,” and “Hiring Student Affairs Staff.” They ultimately used 23 studies in their meta-analysis. The studies were coded to include various independent variables, including the population of the study, institutional type, type of publication, theoretical base/framework, and type of characteristic (i.e., skill, knowledge base or personal trait).

A great deal of variety was present with regard to the population of student affairs personnel who were the focus of the studies reviewed (Lovell & Kosten, 2000). Thirty percent of the studies focused on a combination of populations, 26% focused on SSAO, 22% focused on graduate students, 13% focused on middle managers, and 9% focused on new professionals. Forty-three percent of the studies were conducted in the early to mid-1980s, but only four studies, or 17% were conducted between 1967 and the mid-1970s. The most frequent type of institution studied were 4-year schools (52%) and no studies during this period focused solely on the skills, knowledge bases or personal traits of student affairs personnel at community colleges specifically, but some studies included both 2-year and 4-year institutions. Forty-three percent of the studies examined both private and public institutions, 17% examined only public institutions and there were no studies which examined only private schools. Thirty-nine percent of the studies did not indicate the institutional control for the schools studied. Forty-three percent of the studies were drawn from a national sample, while 26% were drawn from samples of a single state and 13% were drawn from regional samples. With regard to the theoretical frameworks used in the studies, Lovell and Kosten (2000) clustered the studies into two categories: those that were based on student/human development theory (61%) and those based on "other theoretical frameworks" (26%). Examples of the latter include theoretical frameworks related to middle managers, which originated in the business community. Thirty percent of the studies did not use any theoretical framework or theory.

Skills were the most common focus (91%) of the studies examined (Lovell & Kosten, 2000). The most commonly studied skills were administration and management (83%), human facilitation (78%), and research, evaluation and assessment (57%). Seventy percent of the studies examined knowledge bases. Student development theory was the most desired knowledge base (22%), followed by functional unit responsibilities (13%) and academic background (13%). Personal characteristics, although considered important to the success of student affairs administrators, were only discussed in 48% of the studies.

Lovell and Kosten (2000) noted interesting findings when examining relationships among the various independent variables. For example, 71% of the studies of graduate students and new professionals examined knowledge, 89% examined skills and only 29% examined personal traits. Interesting findings emerged with regard to when studies were conducted on different groups. Studies which focused on middle managers and SSAO did not start until the 1980s, and 44% of the studies between 1990 and 1995 focused on these two groups. Graduate students and new professionals were the focus of 43% of studies conducted during the early to mid-1980s, and 56% of the studies focused on middle managers and SSAO. According to Lovell and Kosten (2000), this trend makes sense as the initial focus may have been on establishing and defining the profession of student affairs. In later years, the focus shifted to other higher level administrators, their functions and contributions to the profession and the institutions where they work.

While Lovell and Kosten's (2000) work provides great insight into the important skills, knowledge bases and traits for student affairs professionals between 1967 and 1997, the extent to which the identified skills and competencies are relevant for today's student affairs professionals is unclear. The authors identified a number of gaps that could be explored in the future including the role of skills, knowledge bases and personal traits related to technology, higher education public policy, assessment and higher education politics. Given the changing landscape of higher education it is important to have a current understanding of what is required to be a successful student affairs professional at all levels (i.e., entry level, middle managers, senior student affairs officers), as well as at specific levels and positions within the profession. Roberts' (2003) study of skill attainment and preferred methods of enhancing skills for student affairs administrators who were new professionals, middle managers, and senior student affairs officers, suggested additional exploration into necessary skills and professional development needs for specific positions, as opposed to just types of positions.

**ACPA and NASPA Professional Student Affairs Competencies**

While researchers have attempted to identify the skills, competencies, personal attributes, etc., that are necessary for successful student affairs professional, ACPA and NASPA joined forces recently to identify the key competencies that are necessary for student affairs professionals. In 2009, the two organizations created the Joint Task Force on Professional Competencies and Standards (American College Personnel Association and National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, 2010). The goal of the task force was to develop a set of competency areas and outcomes, applicable to all student affairs professionals in the United States, regardless of specialization. In developing the competencies, the Task Force reviewed current literature and resources regarding professional competencies, standards and expectations for student affairs professionals (American College Personnel Association and National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, 2010).

The Task Force recommendations, which were adopted by ACPA and NAPSA in July 2010, included ten competency areas, including Advising and Helping; Assessment, Evaluation and Research; and Student Learning and Development (See Appendix B for a complete list of the competency areas) (American College Personnel Association and National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, 2010). Each competency was accompanied by a definition, followed by a listing of the knowledge, skills or attitudes necessary for student affairs professionals within each competency. There are three levels within each competency: basic, intermediate, and advanced, with specific knowledge, skills, or attitudes noted for each. The levels are intended to help student affairs professionals identify where they are currently at within each competency area. A student affairs professional may need to advance his/her skill, knowledge or attitude in some areas and not in others, depending on the position he/she holds.

These competencies have value across the student affairs profession (American College Personnel Association and National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, 2010). They are valuable to student affairs professionals because they can aid in setting professional development goals. They are valuable to student affairs leaders because they can be used when they hire new staff, evaluate current staff, and assess the professional development needs of their employees. The competencies are valuable to student affairs professional organizations as they can use them to guide professional development offerings, including aligning conference sessions with the various competencies. Finally, the competencies are valuable to student affairs preparation programs and they can help guide curriculum decisions so that graduates are adequately prepared for success in the field.

**Middle Managers in Higher Education**

As noted earlier, there is a lack of research on student affairs staff in emerging specialist positions such as the "Assistant to" or director of human resources. However, there is a body of literature on staff who are considered "middle managers," both in higher education in general, and within student affairs specifically (Lovell & Kostan, 2000). Although there are varying definitions of what constitutes a middle manager, as will be discussed later, most definitions state that a middle manager in student affairs typically reports to a senior student affairs officer, which is typically the case with specialist positions, such as those noted by Kane (1982) and Tull and Kuk (2012). Mallory, Castillo Clark, and Shulz (2012) noted that in a review of more 25 job descriptions for staff in the "Assistant to" role within student affairs organizations, all of them reported directly to the SSAO. The literature on middle managers within higher education broadly and within student affairs specifically can provide useful insight as we explore issues related to emerging specialist positions within student affairs.

Middle managers in higher education are often referred to as the "unsung professionals of the academy" (Rosser, 2004, p. 317). Rosser (2000) asserts that they are rarely recognized for their contributions to their respective institutions and to higher education, their level of commitment, or the training and excellence they bring to their work. Middle managers are the largest administrative group within higher education, however they are typically not part of the formal governance structure and have little involvement in policy decisions (Rosser, 2000). In 2011 34.8% (867,397) of full-time employees at public and private post-secondary institutions fall into the two categories of positions that have been identified in the literature as encompassing most of the midlevel administrators (Rosser, 2000; U. S. Department of Education, 2012). These positions are support/service and technical staff and paraprofessional staff. Just 9.7% (241,136) of full-time employees were categorized as executives or managers (U. S. Department of Education, 2012).

The sheer number of middle managers can impact an institution in various ways, including its style and tone, as well as the quality of the relationships with members of the campus community (Scott, 1980). Staff in these roles build effective relationships with individuals internal and external to the institution (Johnsrud & Rosser, 1999). In some institutions, middle managers are the staff who students initially interact with when they begin their college career. They are also the staff responsible for administering, monitoring and regulating institutional policies and procedures, although they are rarely allowed to modify or develop the rules they must enforce (Rosser, 2000). Middle managers work in various parts of an institution of higher education, including student services (e.g., admissions, financial aid, advising), academic support (e.g., learning skills), business and administrative services (e.g., accounting, human resources, information technology), and external affairs (e.g., public relations, alumni affairs) (Rosser, 2000).

Rosser (2000) asserts that middle managers are important to higher education because of the level of performance and dedication to their positions. As a result, many are promoted into their positions because they demonstrated skills that indicate they are worthy of additional responsibilities. These skills include strong interpersonal and technical skills, as well as a strong work ethic. Unlike faculty, middle managers do not have a structured or clearly defined career path. There are often multiple entry points for staff in these positions, as well as multiple exit points (Twombly, 1990).

Although the literature on middle managers is relatively limited, there are commonly noted primary sources of frustration among these professionals (Rosser, 2000). The nature of their positions often requires them to administer and enforce policies that they did not have a role in developing. They are often called upon to defend institutional policies and decisions, yet their role in determining the policies and strategic direction, is minimal and vague. Middle managers often feel that they are unappreciated for the work that they do. They provide various levels of assistance to senior staff, yet often feel that their skills, background and expertise are not recognized or appreciated. These negative feelings can lead to increased turnover. If administrative staff feel appreciated and valued, their level of morale regarding their work-life may be enhanced and they might be less likely to leave their position according to Johnsrud, Heck, and Rosser (2000), in a study of more than 1,200 middle managers within a ten-campus university system. In addition to frustration related to the nature of middle management and a perceived lack of appreciation and recognition, another key issue for middle managers is a lack of career development and advancement opportunities (Fey & Carpenter, 1996; Johnsrud & Rosser, 1999). Unlike faculty, staff in middle management positions cannot remain in their position while advancing through different ranks which are accompanied by increased salary and status (Johnsrud, Heck, & Rosser, 2000).

There are similarities between middle managers and individuals in “Assistant to” positions in higher education. According to Stringer (1977), for example, a key issue for some individuals in the “Assistant to” position was the lack of a defined career path. Mallory, Castillo Clark, and Shulz (2012) noted that there is a lack of sufficient professional development opportunities for individuals who serve SSAO in the “Assistant to” position. The role of the “Assistant to” in higher education and within student affairs will be discussed in more detail later.

**Middle Managers in Student Affairs**

Within the field of student affairs, it is common to divide staff into several categories including graduate students, new professionals/entry-level, middle managers (also referred to in the literature as mid-level managers or mid-managers) and senior student affairs officers/senior administrators. Generally speaking, individuals who are considered to be middle managers occupy positions that are not considered to be entry-level or senior executive positions. Staff in student affairs who are employed in specialist positions, such as the “Assistant to”, would typically fall into the middle manager category due to the nature of their position. The literature regarding middle managers in student affairs can provide useful insight into better understanding the role of the “Assistant to” and other specialist staff.

A variety of opinions exist about how to define the role of middle managers in student affairs. Elements of the various definitions include to whom the middle manager reports, their role and title, and their role in managing or directing others. For example, the definition that is often cited in the literature defines a middle manager as

> …one who occupies a position that reports directly to the chief student affairs officer, or to a person who reports directly to the CSAO and is responsible for the direction, control, supervision of one or more student affairs functions, or one or more professional staff members (Kane, 1982, p. 290).

Chernow, Cooper, and Winston (2003) distinguished between two types of middle managers in student affairs based on the administrative distance between them and the SSAO. The lower level includes individuals who are program directors, and the upper level includes those who are associate vice presidents and others who supervise numerous areas.

In a paper read at a conference in 1984, Austin (as cited in Young, 1990a) describes middle managers in higher education with regard to their role or title by asserting that they are "…directors and deans of support services as well as other administrators to whom assistants report" (p.4). Kraus's (as cited in Young 1990) definition of middle managers expands on Austin's and would include "…directors, assistant directors, registrars, a 'host of assistant and associate deans and vice presidents' and many 'assistant to' types of personnel as mid-managers" (pp. 4-5).

While the definition by Kane (1982) and others define middle managers by the type of positions they occupy, others have attempted to define this group by highlighting the type of work they do. According to Mills (2000), middle managers manage people, money, programs and information. According to Young (1990a), middle management is a form of administration, not counseling or instruction, although some aspects of those roles might be included. Penn (1990) states that middle managers are "…those administrative staff who do not function as part of the institution's executive leadership, but who do, as a part of their primary duties, supervise other staff and manage various programs" (p. 44).

According to Scott (1980) and Mills (2000), middle managers in higher education can be distinguished from entry level staff and senior staff by their role vis a vis policy. Scott and Mills both agree that middle managers interpret institutional policies and implement management and/or policy decisions made by senior administrators. Mills' (2000) definition of middle managers notes that they do not create policy, a duty typically left to executive-level administrators. However, he notes that they do have do have influence over policies within their areas of expertise.

However they are defined, middle managers have historically not been afforded the same recognition and respect as other staff in student affairs (Young, 1990a). This parallels the recognition of followers vis a vis leaders in studies of leadership and organizational success (Chaleff, 2009; Kelley, 1992) In 1990 NASPA published a monograph, *The Invisible Leaders: Student Affairs Mid-Managers,* which shed light on middle managers in student affairs (Young, 1990b). In part, this monograph was intended to respond to concerns from middle managers that they were considered "… one of the most important yet least respected levels of student affairs administration" (Young, 1990a, p.1).

One indication of the amount of attention given to middle managers in student affairs is the extent to which they are included in the literature vis a vis other staff in student affairs. Historically, middle managers in student affairs have been relatively ignored in the literature in comparison to other types of staff. Young (1990a) noted that between 1963 and 1988 only one article in the *NASPA Journal* dealt specifically with middle managers, compared to 55 articles which dealt with issues specific to SSAO, during that same time period. Although Young and others who contributed to the monograph have attempted to highlight the role, contributions, and needs of middle managers in student affairs, there is still a relative dearth of literature about them. Lovell and Kosten (2000) noted in their meta-analysis of 23 empirically based studies between 1967 and 1997 which explored the competencies, skills or knowledge bases required of those who are student affairs professionals, only 13% focused on middle managers, while 26% focused on SSAO, 22% focused on graduate students, and 9% focused on new professionals.

Young (2007) who edited the NASPA monograph in 1990 and contributed to a new NASPA monograph titled, *The Mid-Level Manager in Student Affairs: Strategies for Success (*Ackerman, 2007), uses a 2003 article authored by Rosser and Javinar to illustrate the lack of current research regarding middle managers. Rosser and Javinar (2003) published the results of a survey of student affairs middle managers 13 years after the publication of Young's monograph (1990b). However, of the 56 references in the 2003 article, 20 of them were published prior to 1990, and 21 were published between 1990 and 1996. Fifteen references were published after 1996, but five of them were authored or co-authored by Rosser, one of the co-authors of the 2003 article. There is clearly a need for more research about middle managers in student affairs.

Despite the relative lack of research about middle managers in student affairs we do know something about the contributions they make and what they should do to succeed within the profession (Mills, 2000; Mills 2009). Middle managers in student affairs play a number of important roles, including managing and interpreting information, influencing cultures, and supervising staff. Examples of the roles they play will be discussed below.

Middle managers play an important role with regard to managing information of various kinds. The growing complexity of institutions of higher education with regard to accountability and limited resources has made gathering and interpreting information an important task. Middle managers play a key role in using information, such as data related to retention, demographics and financial aid, to make appropriate decisions in response to a changing environment (Mills, 2009). The ability of middle managers to gather information from a variety of sources and share it with their supervisor is another important function (Mills, 2009). A middle manager in student affairs must communicate on a regular basis with his/her supervisor, who is typically a senior or associate senior student affairs officer. They should ensure that their supervisor is informed about relationships with various units across campus. They should also ensure that their supervisor is never surprised by any campus events or issues of which the middle manager is aware.

Another important role of middle managers is influencing and understanding the culture of their institution (Mills, 2000). Their sheer number within their respective institutions enables them to help influence its culture. Additionally, their frequent interaction with individuals at various levels of the institution, including students, put them in a unique position to understand the institution, its myths and traditions. Middle managers who were particularly skilled at their job will use their deep understanding of their institution to assist in solving problems they encounter in the course of their work.

With regard to supervising staff, middle managers must be the leaders of the people they oversee (Mills, 2000). They must be able to motivate staff and delegate tasks, in addition to being adept at performance appraisal and staff selection. Middle managers must also ensure that staff development opportunities are provided to their staff and should encourage staff to consider continuing their formal education by obtaining advanced degrees as appropriate. In the process of obtaining an additional degree, they may enhance their communication, critical thinking and research skills, which benefits them and their organization (White, Webb, & Young, 1990).

Middle managers must attend to their own professional and career development needs, in addition to that of their staff (Mills, 2000). Career mobility is a challenge for middle managers, in part because their career path is not clearly defined. The responsibility of the middle manager is to be intentional about their career aspirations (Mills, 2000). In addition to taking advantage of various professional development opportunities, middle managers wishing to advance should clearly understand the skills needed for the position they are considering (Mills, 2000). Middle managers should articulate specific career and personal objectives, identify the additional training or information required for advancement and develop an individual career plan, which includes determining whether they should develop experience in several areas or just one (Allison & Allison, 1984). In addition to determining what skills are necessary for advancement, the middle manager needs to consider a number of other factors, including their individual desires and goals, the promotion practices and criteria of their institution, and current economic conditions (White, Webb, & Young, 1990).

**Skills and Abilities of Middle Managers in Student Affairs**

Although the literature is relatively limited regarding middle managers in student affairs, some research has examined the skills and abilities that are necessary for middle managers in student affairs positions. Researchers in some studies have asked middle managers themselves which skills are important, some have asked SSAO, and some have asked both groups to assess their skills in various areas (Fey & Carpenter, 1996; Gordon, Borders Strode, & Mann, 1993; Roberts, 2003). Findings from some of these studies will be discussed below.

Gordon, Borders Strode, and Mann (1993) surveyed 250 SSAO from 4-year institutions which were selected randomly by the publisher of the Higher Education Directory. The instrument used was a modification of a survey used by Kane (1982) in his research on middle manager skills. The revised survey included questions about demographics, 45 different skill competencies (e.g., deals effectively with interpersonal problems, builds professional networks, knows how to make decisions), and nine personal characteristics (e.g., personal integrity, enthusiasm, self-confidence) that were perceived to be possessed by staff in student affairs who serve in generalist roles. The respondents were asked to evaluate the relative importance of each skill when hiring a middle manager for a generalist position. The skills were evaluated using a five-point scale where *"1" = essential* and *"5"= Not Essential*. The skills were divided into categories and respondents were asked to rank the categories in order of importance. They were asked to do the same with personal characteristics. Fourteen of the respondents self-selected to participate in comprehensive interviews as a follow-up to the survey.

The respondents were almost evenly divided between public institutions (47%) and private institutions (53%) (Gordon, Borders Strode, & Mann, 1993). The majority of the institutions represented in the study (54%) had less than 5,000 students, 19% had between 5,000-10,000 students and 27% of the respondents' institutions had more than 10,000 students. Most of the respondents (72%) were male. Among those SSAO who were interviewed, 12 were male and half were from schools with fewer than 5,000 students.

Almost all of the respondents indicated that 34 of the 45 skills in the survey were "essential" (Gordon, Borders Strode, & Mann, 1993). Many of respondents commented in writing that it was difficult to determine the relative importance of the skills because "all are of equal importance" (Gordon, Borders Strode, & Mann, 1993, p. 292). This is not surprising since generalists need to be skilled in many areas due to the nature of their position. With regard to the ranks of the seven categories, they were as follows, with the most important skill category first and the mean ranking noted in parentheses (the lower the mean the more important the skill relative to others): *Leadership* (1.80), *Student Contact* (2.64), *Communication* (2.78), *Personnel Management* (3.79), *Fiscal Management* (4.81), *Professional Development* (5.48) and *Research and Evaluation* (6.62). The SSAO who were interviewed ranked the categories in a similar fashion, although those from small institutions ranked *Student Contact* as the most important. Interviewees ranked *Research and Evaluation* as the least important skill category, as did the survey respondents. Since this survey was conducted in the early 1990s, it would be interesting to explore whether changes in the higher education environment related to accountability, evaluation, and outcomes assessment would change the relative ranking of this skill.

Within the various skill categories some specific skills were identified as the most important, relative to other skills (Gordon, Borders Strode, & Mann, 1993). For example, although all of the *Leadership* competencies were considered "essential," "Accepts responsibility or delegates as appropriate" was ranked first. In the *Student Contact* category, the ability to "Develop mutual understanding and trust with students" was first among the five items in that category. In the *Communication* category, the ability to maintain confidentiality was the most important skill. Although as a category *Research and Evaluation* was ranked the lowest, respondents felt that assessing student needs and understanding the importance of assessing program effectiveness were the two most important skills in this area. Despite near uniform agreement among the respondents of the skills that were most essential in middle managers, there were some differences between responses based on institutional type. For example, private school SSAO did not place as much emphasis on grant writing skills as did those from public institutions, and small schools SSAO placed a higher level of importance on being able to thrive with close and frequent contact with students than SSAO from larger institutions.

The seven personal characteristics were also ranked in order of relative importance. The SSAO in the study ranked *Personal Integrity* (1.88) and *Interest in Students* (2.69) as the most important and ranked *Sense of Humor* (6.39) and *Loyalty* (6.44) as the least important, although there was not a great difference among the bottom five characteristics. When the responses were examined based on the institutional type, there were many similarities, but a few differences. For example, *Personal Integrity* and

*Interest in Students* were ranked first and second by SSAO in both types of institutions, but *Enthusiasm* was ranked third for SSAO from public institutions and fourth for SSAO from private ones. *Self-confidence* was ranked third among SSAO from private institutions and sixth among SSAO from public ones.

Topics which were discussed with the interviewees included staff selection processes, mobility patters and factors used when hiring when experience and education are similar among candidates (Gordon, Borders Strode, & Mann, 1993). SSAO who worked at small institutions indicated that it is important to hire staff who can meet the needs of the particular position, but who are also capable of handling division-wide responsibilities. This is particularly important at a small school because staff need to be team players. The SSAO indicated that when trying to decide between candidates with similar education and backgrounds they take into account personal characteristics such as enthusiasm, honesty, being a team player, and the ability to “hit the ground running” (Gordon, Borders Strode, & Mann, 1993, p. 295). With regard to mobility, the previously mentioned concerns about the career mobility of middle managers were reinforced by the SSAO interviewed. Small-school SSAO felt that the school’s size made it difficult for middle managers to move up within the institution. SSAO at mid-sized institutions felt that the longevity of staff in positions make mobility an issue, in addition to smaller budgets and fewer staff positions. SSAO at large institutions concurred and identified the high cost of replacing middle management staff as a concern.

The work of Gordon, Borders Strode, and Mann (1993) sought to identify essential skills, competencies and personal characteristics for middle managers in student affairs from the perspective of SSAO. Fey and Carpenter (1996) sought to shed light on this issue, but from the perspective of the middle managers themselves. As with Gordon, et al. (1993) they based their study on work done by Kane (1982) and used their survey instrument with modifications for language and changes in the ordering of items. The purpose of Fey and Carpenter's (1996) survey was to determine the importance of various skills for middle managers in student affairs, to examine the perceptions of the respondents regarding the need for additional skill development, to discover the favorite methods of middle managers to develop their skills, and to explore the effect of setting and demographics on the perceived skills of middle managers. In the study a middle manager was defined as a person who reported directly to the SSAO at their institution or a person who was one level removed from the SSAO and was responsible for the direction or control of one or more student affairs functions, or supervision for at least one professional staff member (Fey & Carpenter, 1996).

The survey included skill-oriented questions grouped into seven categories (e.g., leadership skills, communication skills, research and evaluation skills), as was done by Gordon, Borders Strode, and Mann (1993). The respondents were asked to evaluate the importance of the factor, using a modified Likert scale with the responses ranging from *Not Important (1)* to *Essential (4),* and the perceived need for further skill development which was measured through a "yes" or "no" response. There were additional questions about demographics, employment, and preferred methods of professional development. The survey was sent to 319 individuals who were members of the Texas Association of College and University Student Personnel Administrators. They received 276 responses (85.6% of the total membership) and 177 were eligible for the study based on the definition of middle manager (Fey & Carpenter, 1996).

Previous studies on the topic of middle managers and SSAOs regarding skills that were important for middle managers consistently ranked *Leadership* as the most important skill (Gordon, Borders Strode, & Mann 1993 and Kane, 1982). However, the middle managers who responded to this survey considered *Personnel Management*, with a mean ranking of 3.37, to be the most important skill (Fey & Carpenter, 1996). The other skills in order of importance from second to last (with the means noted in parentheses) were *Leadership* (3.3), *Communication* (3.22), *Student Contact* (3.22), *Fiscal Management* (3.19), *Professional Development* (3.04), and *Research and Evaluation* (2.61).

When differences between public and private institutions were explored, the data revealed that although most administrators at both types of institutions felt that fiscal management skills were important, there was a statistically significant difference between the 81% of private school respondents and the 94% of public school respondents who thought this skill was important (Fey & Carpenter, 1996). Although there were no significant differences with regard to the perceived importance of management skills based on the size of the respondent's institution, some differences were noted. For example, for respondents at small institutions *Student Contact* was ranked third and *Communication* was ranked fourth in importance. Respondents from medium-size institutions ranked *Fiscal Management* third followed by *Communication* and *Student Contact*. For respondents from large institutions *Communication* was ranked second followed by *Leadership*. With regard to needed skill development, *Fiscal Management*, which was ranked fifth in terms of importance, was identified as the only area where additional skill development was needed.

When evaluating responses based on the age, gender and ethnicity of the respondents, most of the differences were not statistically significant, but some were noted as interesting by the authors (Fey & Carpenter, 1996). The only statistically significant difference was the difference in the rating of importance of *Student Contact* by those who were over 40 and those who were under 40. Those who were over 40 rated *Student Contact* lower in importance than those who were younger. With regard to ethnicity, Blacks rated *Leadership* lower in importance than Whites or Hispanics. Whites rated *Fiscal Management* lower than did Blacks and Hispanics. Whites gave the lowest ranks to *Professional Development*, Blacks ranked *Research and Evaluation* the lowest as did Hispanics, although Hispanics gave it a higher rating than did Whites. With regard to gender, female respondents rated all skill categories, except *Student Contact*, as more important than males. The greatest difference was found with regard to *Leadership*, but it was not significant.

In evaluating the results, Fey and Carpenter (1996) noted that the skills which respondents ranked highly (i.e., *Personnel Management*, *Leadership* and *Communication*) all involve personal interaction, unlike skills which were ranked lower, such as *Fiscal Management* and *Research and Evaluation*. This preference for personal interaction was also noted in the preferred methods of professional development. Respondents were drawn to opportunities such as conferences and discussions which allowed them to interact with others. The relative importance which middle managers assigned to skills that involve personal interaction may be influenced by the fact that these positions may involve more contact with other staff and students, when compared to other positions, such as that of the SSAO.

It is worth noting that there are differences, however, between the importance of skills from the perspective of SSAO and from middle managers when the results of Fey and Carpenter (1996) and Gordon, Borders Strode, and Mann (1993) are compared. Fey and Carpenter (1996) made a key point which may identify an area ripe for further exploration, particularly for those in specialty positions, such as the "Assistant to":

> To become even more effective and valuable to their institutions and to their executives, they [middle managers] need to better understand what CSAAs [Chief Student Affairs Administrators] and CEOs feel are important skills and pursue professional development on a continuous basis. By increasing their effectiveness in their current positions, they will be more marketable for promotion into higher mid-level or executive level positions (p. 4).

Roberts (2003) built upon the work of Kane (1982), Gordon, Borders Strode, and Mann (1993) and others in an effort to identify perceptions of skill attainment for various levels of student affairs professionals, including middle managers, in addition to exploring other research questions. Roberts (2003) surveyed 803 student affairs professionals who were members of NAPSA Region III, which includes Alabama, Florida, Georgia and several other Southern states, and obtained a 61.6% response rate. The survey instrument contained three sections including demographics, and questions about skills divided into 10 skill categories, including all seven categories contained in studies by Fey and Carpenter (1996) and Gordon, et al., (1993) with three additional categories: *Legal Issues*, *Diversity*, and *Technology*. Respondents were asked to rate their perceived level of skill attainment on a five-point scale as follows: *1="I have not begun* *working on this yet" and 5= "I feel that I have essentially mastered or accomplished this."*

The survey respondents were predominately female (62%) and white (81%), which is similar to the demographics of the population of NAPSA Region III members, which is 59% female and 74% White (Roberts, 2003). African-Americans accounted for 11% of the respondents, 4% were Hispanic/Latino, 1% were Bi/multiracial .8% were Native American, and .2% were Asian American. Middle managers were the largest group of survey respondents (69%), followed by new professionals (20%), and SSAO (12%). The majority of the respondents (61.6%) were from institutions with more than 10,000 students.

Among middle managers, the skill categories with the highest means were *Communication* (4.03), *Student Contact* (3.93), and *Leadership* (3.78) (Roberts, 2003). With regard to individual skills, the ones with the highest means for middle managers included "maintaining appropriate levels of confidentiality" (4.55), "writing effective correspondence and reports" (4.26), and "providing assistance and services to students" (4.22). The top two individual skills which the middle managers felt most confident about were both in the *Communication* category and the third highest ranked individual skill was in the *Student Contact* category. The skill categories with the lowest means were *Research, Evaluation and Assessment* (3.23), *Fiscal Management* (3.32) and *Legal Issues* (3.43). The individual skills with the lowest means were "developing services for distant learners" (1.89), "writing grants and contracts to garner additional resources" (2.18) and "writing an article for professional publication" (2.38). These skills were in the

*Technology*, *Fiscal Management*, and *Professional Development* skill categories, respectively.

### The "Assistant to" in Higher Education

The "Assistant" to position is one example of a specialist position within higher education in general and student affairs in particular (Tull & Kuk, 2012). As noted earlier, it is the most common within student affairs, yet there is a lack of literature about this position within student affairs and in higher education as a whole (Tull & Rammell, 2012). In order to better understand this position with regard to student affairs it is important to look at the position's history elsewhere in higher education and in other organizational contexts.

The "Assistant to" position began to become a common feature in the business world as corporations became more complex in the 1950s and initially had two general uses (Whisler, 1956). The title was often used for the "…incompetent but senior executive…" who had been removed from a position, but remained with the company. The other use of the title was for those individuals who were expected to "make a contribution to the successful operation of his [sic] company" (p. 274). The chief executive who created such a position would often explain that there was a need for someone to handle "special projects," tasks that were too important to be delegated, but too time consuming for the CEO to handle personally. According to interviews with individuals holding these positions, there were three primary functions, including assisting their boss with interpreting the information received from subordinates, interpreting their boss for those who work below them, and initiating the flow of information about organizational needs to the executive that they might not receive otherwise. These functions are similar to those performed by middle managers in student affairs (Mills, 2000; Mills, 2009; Young, 1990b).

Although this position originated in business, it exists in a variety of other settings, including the military, federal government, city management, and higher education (Whisler, 1960; Stringer, 1977). Whisler (1960) studied these positions in all of the above areas, except higher education, and highlighted several commonalities among the various positions. These include the “Assistant to” as an intermediary between the executive and those who they must interact with, the flexibility of the role and the activities associated with it, and the dependency of the job of the “Assistant to” on the mutual relationship between themselves and the executive for whom they work. Whisler (1960) notes that “….these pervasive dimensions of the role, and its widespread existence, indicate that the personal assistant is a positive gain to the man [sic] above him and possibly to those below him in the hierarchy” (p. 207). Whisler’s observation alludes the value of followers in an organization.

The “Assistant to” position has existed in higher education since 1904 when Oberlin College created the position of “assistant to the president” (Giddens, 1971). This position was intended to focus on public relations and fundraising. Although this position was created in the early part of the 20$^{th}$ Century, there were not a critical mass of individuals in this position until the 50s and 60s. The increased use of this position within higher education may have been influenced by the position’s growth in the corporate sector. According to Stringer (1977), by the 1970s the “Assistant to” position was fairly common in higher education in the United States, although he does not indicate the basis for this claim.

Giddens (1971) conducted a study of assistants to the president in 1970. At the time there were at least 225 listed in the *Education Directory 1969-70,* and he selected 75 of them to receive a questionnaire about the establishment of their position, characteristics of those who held the position, job responsibilities, and their respective institutions. He obtained a 20% response rate from the individuals he surveyed. Assistants to the president were overwhelming male; only one respondent was a female, which no doubt influenced the title of the article: "*The Assistant to the President: Who is he?*" (Giddens, 1971). With regard to educational achievement, Giddens (1971) found that 100% of the sample had a bachelor's degree, 60% a master's or first professional degree, and 35% had a doctorate. There was no indication of the academic disciplines of any of the degrees earned. Ninety-eight percent of the respondents had previous teaching experience and 53% had previous administrative experience, mostly at the collegiate level.

In addition to demographic information, Giddens (1971) gathered information about the institutions where these positions existed and when they were created. Among the sample group, 18 of their positions had been created between 1965 and 1969, 11 between 1960 and 1965, seven between 1950 and 1960, and five between 1940 and 1950. Giddens (1971) found that these positions existed at a variety of institutions, including those which differ based on size, curriculum offered, and public or private status. With regard to the size of the institution, this position appeared to be more common at larger institutions. For example, ten institutions with enrollments between 10,000 and 19,999 had an assistant to the president, as did eight of the institutions above 20,000 students. Four schools between 5,000 and 9,999 students and between 500 and 999 students had this position, as did five schools between 1000 and 1,999 students, and nine institutions with enrollments between 2,000 and 4,999. Sixty-seven percent of the institutions with an assistant to the president were public.

The duties of the assistant to the president varied widely, which is true of individuals in similar positions today within student affairs (Giddens, 1971; Mallory, Castillo Clark, & Shulz, 2012). The most commonly performed duties by the respondents in the sample were serving as a member of a committee of top level administrators (89%), supervising or conducting research on institutional policies, practices, procedures and problems (75%), helping develop long range plans (73%), writing speeches or other documents used by the president/chancellor (73%), working on public relations projects (67 %), and serving as a liaison with a governmental unit (62%) (Giddens, 1971). Fifty-three percent of the assistants reported performing “additional duties” that did not fall into the categories provided on the questionnaire. These included serving as the acting president in the absence of the president, scheduling meetings for the president or chancellor, developing proposals for grants or contracts, and representing the president or chancellor at meetings or public ceremonies.

While Giddens (1971) focused on assistants to the president, Stringer (1977) built on his work by studying the “Assistant to” in higher education more generally. He conducted individual interviews at one large state-supported institution with multiple campuses. He interviewed “superordinates” such as the president, the vice president of the university system, chancellors and vice chancellors of academic affairs on the main campus, as well as associate deans, in addition to those in “Assistant to” roles. In total he interviewed 27 superordinates and 18 individuals in the “Assistant to” role. For the purposes of this study "Assistant to" was defined as a personal assistant, reporting to a high-level executive, with flexible assignments, with little or no line responsibilities" (Stringer, 1977, p. 194). Stringer specifically noted that an "Assistant to" was not a "second in command" and does not typically supervise full-time professional staff.

Stringer (1977) identified six role types of "Assistant to" at the institutions studied and noted that there is overlap among the various types. These roles include *colleague*, *administrative assistant*, *military staff*, *intern*, *specialist*, and *freelance*, with the first three being the most common. Stringer (1977) describes the *colleague* as the "alter ego" for the superordinate who is perceived by their superiors and themselves as equal to the organization's chief executive. However, they are not the second in command, but participate in all major policy discussions and the input into decision making is similar to that of associate deans in various institutions. The nature of the institution and some of the individuals in the "Assistant to" position may have contributed to their *colleague* status. At least one was a former vice president, another was located in a school with a lot of turnover at the deans level and was seen as "the one continuing thread in the deanship of the school" (Stringer, 1977, p. 196). Those who are in the *administrative assistant* role are clearly subordinates, according to Stringer (1977). They have minor administrative chores, such as scheduling appointments and taking minutes at committee meetings. The individuals in this role tend to have less freedom to define their positions than those in other types.

*Military staff* types are similar to *administrative assistants* in that they receive assignments from their superordinates in much the same way (Stringer, 1977). They often work on shorter-term projects and have few ongoing responsibilities and are expected to be able to move from one project to another. This is very similar to those in the "Assistant to" position in student affairs organizations who are often assigned special projects on which to work (Mallory, Castillo Clark, & Shulz, 2012). Those who are in this role were generally above the Dean's level at the institution studied, typically had regular contact with their superordinates, and spoke for their superordinate from time to time. Those in this role generally feel that the information they control is very important to the functioning of the institution.

With regard to the other role types, *interns* were found to be used in a specific school and were more akin to a pool of secretaries with their services available to the dean and associate deans (Stringer, 1977). *Specialists* were those who have flexible assignments, but also have specific areas of expertise that is not typically shared by others in the organization. For example, one specialist focused on grant administration and another focused on financial reconciliations and projects. *Freelancers* are those individuals who are able to transcend typical organizational boundaries. They are generalists and receive assignments from their superordinates, but have a great deal of freedom with regard to how they complete their assignments. They are a key link in the institution's communication chain and they are more likely to be on a first name basis with most of the institution's key superordinates. They are also more likely to be visible on campus and are often contacted by others at the institution who are looking for an "in" with their superordinate. The role of the *freelancer*, is similar to the role played by the "Assistant to" within student affairs. Individuals in this position work with other staff across the organization and outside of student affairs on a regular basis, and are the "go to" person for those wishing to know what the SSAO thinks about an issue or a particular initiative's direction (Mallory, Castillo Clark, & Shulz, 2012).

Stringer (1977) examined the influences of the "Assistant to" on their organization. He found that the level of influence varied by the issue and the type of assistant. Generally they were not found to have much influence over the important decisions within their organizations. However, their greatest amount of influence came in areas related to allocation of funds, long range planning, and the least amount of influence was in the curricular area. Across the various roles, the *colleague* had the greatest amount of influence, but it was relative to the other types. Stringer (1977) asserts that since the "Assistant to" is outside the normal channels of decision making their influence is the result of informal contacts with their superiors or other key decision makers.

For individuals in the "Assistant to" position there is not a defined career path according to Stringer (1977). This is also an issue for individuals who are considered middle managers in higher education generally, and within student affairs specifically (Mills, 2000). Among the people interviewed for Stringer's study there were an array of backgrounds, including many who had experience outside of higher education. Those in the *colleague* and *military staff* roles were more likely to have extensive administrative experience. *Specialists* and *freelancers* also typically had administrative experience, but to a lesser degree. Those in *military staff* positions often knew the superordinate previously. *Intern* positions were considered entry level, thus a great deal of experience was not needed.

With regard to future aspirations, only 28% of individuals in the “Assistant to” position wanted to advance to a higher position in higher education administration (Stringer, 1977). There seemed to be a distinction based on age, with the assistants in their 20s and 30s mostly interested in advancing their careers, mostly in higher education and the older staff in the “Assistant to” position seemingly content to stay in their present positions. Stringer’s (1977) interviews seemed to indicate that part of the hesitance about advancement within higher education may relate to the educational attainment of the “Assistant to” vs. the superordinate. While 15 of 17 superordinates had terminal degrees, typically a doctorate, only one “Assistant to” did.

Stringer (1977) noted the lack of information about the “Assistant to” position in the literature and cites several consequences, including the lack of guidelines for the utilization of this position by chief executives and a lack of understanding about the proper functions of these positions. Additional study of this group could enhance the maximization of these positions. Stringer (1977) also identified several areas of future inquiry regarding the “Assistant to” in higher education, including an analysis of how “Assistant to” positions fit into administrative staffing patterns, and the impact of “Assistant to” positions on the desired interaction patterns within a university. His advocacy for additional research into this position is germane today given the increase of these positions within the student affairs profession. The consequences cited by Stringer in 1977 of the lack of exploration into this position are still relevant in 2013.

### The “Assistant to” In Student Affairs

Within student affairs the “Assistant to” position is becoming more common. According to a recent survey of 250 SSAO who were NASPA voting delegates at both two- and four-year institutions, 34.6% reported having an “Assistant to” or a chief of staff, and of those 83.5% indicated that they had an “Assistant to” position within their student affairs organization (Tull & Rammell, 2012). Reasons for creating such a position included having a staff person to handle day-to-day operations within the office of the SSAO, having someone with the flexibility to take on a variety of projects, and having someone who can assist with various communication efforts, including drafting letters, speeches, and presentations. Many of these reasons are similar to the functions identified by Giddens (1971) in his study of assistants to the president.

The increase in the “Assistant to” positions within student affairs is also linked to changes in the field of higher education, as well as the role of the SSAO (Kuk, 2012a). As noted earlier, within higher education there are increasing demands for accountability and demonstrating student learning and decreasing funding, particularly for public institutions. These demands have impacted the student affairs organization, as well as the position of the SSAO (Dungy & Ellis, 2011; Hemphill, 2012). In addition, the portfolio of student affairs organizations has expanded in response to the changing needs of students (Kuk & Banning, 2009; Manning, Kinzie, & Schuh, 2006). As a result many SSAO have seen the need for a staff person in their organization who can step in when needed, assist with issues such as crisis management, assessment, strategic planning, and grant writing.

The duties of the “Assistant to” within student affairs have some similarities and differences. In some ways they are reflective of findings in the literature regarding the duties of assistants to the president and other “Assistant to” positions in higher education. Mallory, Castillo Clark, and Shulz (2012) reviewed the position descriptions of 25

“Assistant to” positions in student affairs at 22 four-year colleges. In every instance the “Assistant to” reported directly to the SSAO, which is aligned with the definition used by Stringer (1977) in his work, as well as with the common definitions for middle managers in student affairs (Young, 1990a). Their titles included assistant to the vice president, special assistant to the vice president, and director of strategic planning and initiatives. The most common job responsibilities were assessment (84%), communications (56%), student concerns and professional development (both 52%), and budget management, strategic planning, and technology/web development (all at 48%). Other duties identified included diversity initiatives (24%), Board of Trustee related duties (20%), space management (14%) and enrollment/admissions (9%). In addition, special projects were a common feature of these positions. Forty-four percent reported being frequently asked to perform duties outside of their job descriptions.

As with any position, there are both successes and challenges for those in “Assistant to” positions (Mallory, Castillo Clark, & Shulz, 2012). Successes include the opportunity to work on a variety of issues in support of their student affairs division, being seen as the point person by the SSAO and other colleagues, and having the ability to address emerging demands or issues. This position allows for the SSAO to delegate tasks that are important, but for which they cannot work on themselves. This is similar to the rationale for these positions found by Giddens (1971) at the presidential level. Among the challenges of these positions are the constant change with regard to roles and responsibilities and the ability to be proactive while juggling a number of different responsibilities.

Like Stringer (1971), Mallory, Castillo Clark, and Shulz (2012) identify future research needs related to the “Assistant to” in student affairs. Although informal gatherings of staff in these positions have taken place at national conferences, such as NASPA, there is a lack of training or development beyond these meetings. There is lack of understanding of the professional development needs of staff who work in these positions. Increased professional development would help to enhance the effectiveness of those in these positions and would help to identify best practices.

## Conceptual Framework: The Courageous Follower Model

The “Assistant to” within student affairs organizations is primarily a follower, although they may have leadership responsibilities and status within an organization. The very nature of their role is to help their leader, the SSAO, to be successful and to assist in completing various tasks necessary to the success of the organization or carrying out the vision of the SSAO. As noted previously in this chapter there are several models which evaluate followers and the way that they work vis a vis their respective leader. Of these models, Chaleff’s (2009) Courageous Follower model is the most evolved in my opinion and the one best suited for exploring the role of the “Assistant to.” As discussed earlier in this chapter, Chaleff identifies four types of followers, as well as five dimensions of those who are exemplary followers, which he refers to as Courageous Followers. The desired behavioral attributes of those followers provide a useful framework for examining the work of those who work as an “Assistant to” for an SSAO. This framework will facilitate an exploration of this position through a theoretical lens that goes beyond merely describing the types of tasks that they perform. The Courageous Follower framework provides an opportunity to explore how the “Assistant to” does their work and how they contribute to the success of their organizations, and the SSAO for whom they work.

While Kelley’s (1992) ground breaking work helped to shift the focus to the role of the follower in the leadership process and organizational success, Chaleff goes further by asserting that followers are a dynamic part of an organization and an active participant in the success of a leader or organization. Chaleff’s typology is based on the extent to which a follower challenges and supports their leader, which is intuitively vital for someone such as an “Assistant to” who works very closely with their SSAO. He builds on this typology by articulating the behavioral attributes that a follower should have to be exemplary, which goes beyond the work of Kelley, Kellerman (2008) and others.

In addition to exploring various followership models to guide this proposed study, other relevant frameworks were evaluated. A great deal of consideration was given to using the Leadership Code model proposed by Ulrich, Smallwood, and Sweetman (2008) as a conceptual framework. This model is based on previous work of Ulrich (2008) regarding the concept of a “leadership brand.” A leadership brand refers to the reputation that an organization has for developing exceptional managers with talents that meet the unique needs of their organization. Before building a leadership brand an organization must master what Ulrich and Smallwood refer to as the “Leadership Code,” a set of specific competencies that managers within the organization must have (Ulrich, Smallwood, & Sweetman).

With the Leadership Code model, a successful organization would have a leadership development model which helps managers develop and hone all aspects of the leadership code (Ulrich & Smallwood, 2007). Ideally, a manager should be strong in at least one area, but demonstrate a high level of competence in all of them. The Leadership Code model identifies five competency areas, including Human Capital Developer, Talent Manager, Personal Proficiency, Strategist, and Executor (Ulrich, Smallwood, & Sweetman, 2008). Some of these competencies focus on the individual, while others focus on the organization. Some competencies are geared for long term/strategic purposes and others are focused on the short-term and operational needs.

The Leadership Code model was considered as a way to explore the role of the "Assistant to", specifically to examine how staff in this role complement the competencies of the SSAO for whom they work. However, because this model is focused on the role of the leader and how they contribute to organization and not on the follower, this model is not used as a framework. The follower aspect of the "Assistant to" is too critical to understanding both how this position contributes to organizational success and to that of the SSAO to ignore. Thus any framework chosen must address followers in a substantial way.

After exploring various frameworks, particularly those which focus on the role of the follower in organizational success, Chaleff's (2009) model was chosen for this research study. Chaleff proposes five dimensions, each with specific behaviors, that are necessary in order to be a *Courageous Follower.* He also asserts that followership, particularly the concept of courageous followership, will help organizations be more efficient, more humane, and more responsive. Chaleff chose the term Courageous Follower intentionally to demonstrate that his view of followers differed from the typical view of followers vis a vis leaders and their role in organizations. He states "I am choosing the image of the 'courageous follower' to build a model of followership because courage is so antithetical to the prevailing image of followers and so crucial to balancing the relationship with leaders" (Chaleff, 2009, p. 4).

Chaleff, (2009) sees followers as an active contributor to their organization or leader's success, but is aware that others do not share that view. According to Chaleff (2009) the term follower:

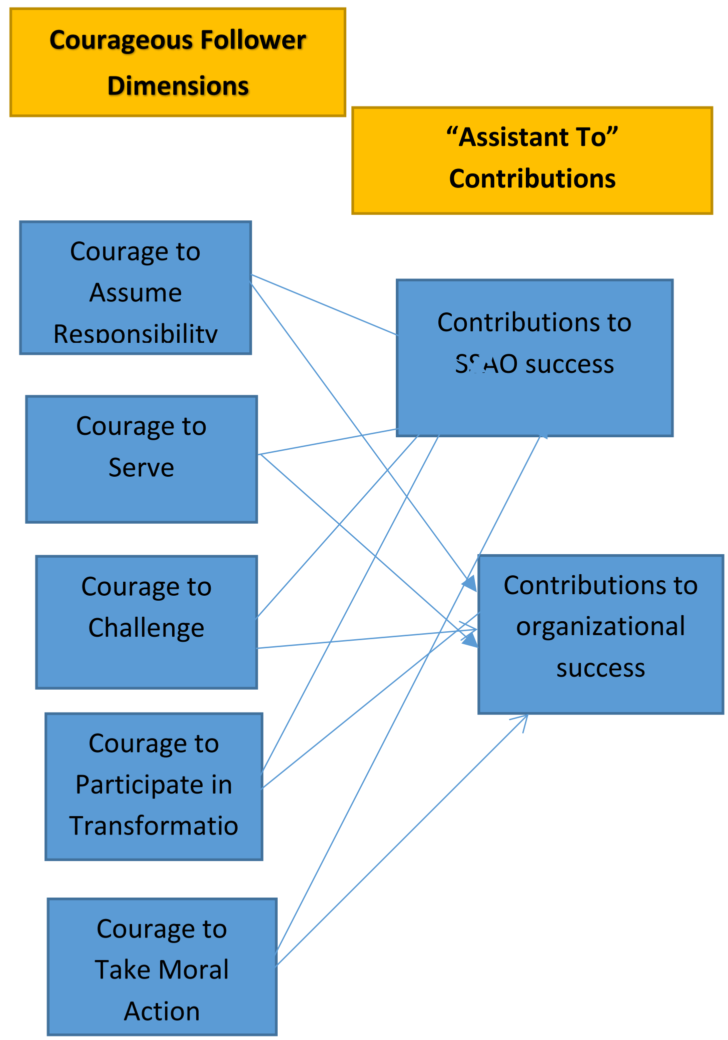
> ….conjures up images of docility, conformity, weakness, and failure to excel….The sooner we move beyond these images and get comfortable with the idea of powerful followers supporting powerful leaders, the sooner we can fully develop and test the model for dynamic, self-responsible, synergistic relationships in our organizations" (p. 3)

Chaleff (2009) strongly believes that followers are a critical piece of any organization. He states that "…the value of a follower is measured by how completely the follower helps the leader and organization pursue their common purpose..." (p. 19). It is this commitment to the common purpose that brings the follower and leader together in a unique relationship. The common view of the role of followers does not allow for the fact that a follower may have a more active role to play in the success of an organization and/or a leader. This view also does not allow for the notion that the relationship between the follower and leader may be a dynamic one. Chaleff's Courageous Follower model presents an alternative view, one that is well suited to explore how the "Assistant to" contributes to their student affairs organization.

Chaleff (2009) does not view a follower as a mere subordinate. He sees a follower as a person who "shares a common purpose with the leader, believes in what the organization is trying to accomplish, wants both the leader and the organization to succeed, and works energetically to this end" (p. 15). The follower, according to Chaleff, has power in the relationship with the leader. For example, followers have the ability to help leaders to be agents of change when they are unable to do so themselves. Followers have knowledge, skills and resources that the leader and the organization value and want to retain, and typically they have a personal history and a record of success with the organization. They also have the power to influence others, as well as the power of leveraging relationships and managing communication, all for the benefit of the leader and the organization. The powers of a follower as outlined by Chaleff are similar in many ways to the role of the "Assistant to" identified by Whisler (1960) and by Mallory, Castillo Clark, and Shulz (2012). For example, Whisler, who studied staff in this role outside of higher education, noted that the "Assistant to" played a key role in keeping lines of communication open, and keeping subordinates informed about organizational issues and the intentions of the organization's leader. With regard to the "Assistant to" in student affairs organizations, Mallory, Castillo Clark, and Shulz note in a survey of SSAO that 56% of "Assistant to" staff had communications as an area of responsibility.

In Chaleff's (2009) model of followership, although The Partner is the preferred type of follower within the typology framework, the truly exemplary follower is a Courageous Follower who demonstrates five dimensions: *The Courage to Assume Responsibility, The Courage to Serve, The Courage to Challenge, The Courage to Participate in Transformation, and The Courage to Take Moral Action*. Figure 2 below provides a graphic representation of the areas of inquiry for this study, including the dimensions of a Courageous Follower and how they contribute to the success of their student affairs organization and the success of their SSAO. These five dimensions will be described briefly below and in more detail next.

*Figure 2:* Courageous Follower Dimensions as a Framework for Understanding the Role of the Assistant To in Student Affairs




- *The Courage to Assume Responsibility* refers to the ability of a follower to assume responsibility for themselves as well as their organizations, and being actively engaged in their success. Courageous followers find and create opportunities that enable them to fulfill their potential, while also maximizing the value they bring to their organization. Self-assessment, including an awareness of one's follower style, and a commitment to personal development are important behaviors of this dimension.

- *The Courage to Serve* refers to the ability of a follower to work hard to serve the leader and the organization. A Courageous Follower willingly assumes new responsibilities in order to serve her/his leader and organization. They are also vigilant about identifying opportunities that permit them to leverage their strengths in ways that complement their leader and they are willing to stand up for their leader when needed.
- *The Courage to Challenge* refers to the ability to speak out when policies or behaviors of the group or the leader conflict with their sense of right and wrong. Although Courageous Followers value organizational harmony, they are willing to place integrity and the pursuit of the common purpose above the desire for harmony.
- *The Courage to Participate in Transformation* refers to the ability of the follower to recognize when there is a need for transformation in order to return to the necessary focus on the common purpose. A Courageous Follower is one who fully participates in the transformation process, including examining their own need to transform, as well as providing resources to aid in the transformation.
- *The Courage to Take Moral Action* refers to the ability of followers to know when it is time to take a principled stand that may differ from those who lead their organizations. A Courageous Follower is one who is willing to disobey an order,

take a matter of concern to an authority above their leader, or even resign their position.

When a follower demonstrates *The Courage to Assume Responsibility* they are indicating to their leader that they are ready to be a strong partner in achieving the leader's desired outcomes and enhancing the organization (Chaleff, 2009). According to Chaleff, it is critical that Courageous Followers be committed to their personal growth and development, which includes assessing their follower style, seeking feedback from others on how they work within the organization, and seeking out opportunities for personal development. Chaleff also asserts that Courageous Followers need to engage in "self-management" in order to maximize their worth to their leader. This means they must be organized and able to delegate appropriately. They must also have balance with regard to work and non-work activities. Without such balance a follower may actually diminish their ability to be an active participant in the success of their organization. Courageous Followers demonstrate a strong passion for what they do, and ideally this passion matches that of their leader, which enhances their partnership. If the follower feels that the passion is diminished, according to Chaleff they must take steps look inward to "reignite" the passion that is missing.

Chaleff (2009) asserts that a key behavior of *The Courage to Assume Responsibility* is the ability to take initiative to move the organization forward and to do so with an eye on the common purpose. Courageous Followers, according to Chaleff can impact an organization in a myriad of ways. They help to influence the culture through their actions and commitment to particular values. They can also help the organization by drawing attention to rules that impede the organization's success. Sometimes it is necessary to break these rules, but the Courageous Follower does so transparently as a way of drawing attention to the need for change. The Courageous Follower can also help to shift an organization's mindset. They might do this in a number of ways, according to Chaleff, including consulting with outside experts, seeking feedback from stakeholders, and benchmarking their organization against peers or relevant standards and best practices.

In introducing *The Courage to Serve*, Chaleff (2009) references the work of those who are employed as Chiefs of Staff for U.S. senators. Within student affairs organizations, the Chief of Staff role is a position that is similar in nature to the "Assistant to" in that it is a cross-specialist position, but is often has different responsibilities than those found in the "Assistant to" position (Bonner & Fleming, 2012). Chaleff (2009) notes that "It takes courage to serve as a close aide to a senior leader. If you bother leaders with too many matters, you will squander their energy; if you fail to bring things that they need to know to their attention, you may blindside them, causing embarrassment or calamity" (p. 57).

In Chaleff's model *The Courage to Serve* is primarily focused on the needs of the leader and supporting her/him as they lead the organization. Chaleff also makes the case that in order to serve a leader adequately, the follower has to sometimes take care of the leader. The ability to take care of the leader stems in some ways from the ability to care about the leader. The need for this emotional connection makes it vital that the leader and follower have a meaningful relationship with each other. Such a relationship helps to create trust. A strong relationship with a significant level of trust allows the follower to deliver "tough love" if needed, and also allows the leader to feel comfortable when the follower acts without consultation because he/she knows the follower is acting in the best interest of the leader and the organization. The importance of a relationship between a leader and a follower, particularly those who may work as a close aide, as would an "Assistant to," was highlighted by Whisler (1960) when discussing the role of the "Assistant to" in a different types of organizations.

According to Chaleff (2009), a key behavior of serving the leader is helping to ensure that their time is used as efficiently as possible. This means that the follower must be a good gate keeper so that the leader can focus on critical issues. This also means helping to determine which activities and duties refresh a leader and which serve to drain their energy. With regard to the latter, a Courageous Follower may need to assume some responsibilities so that the leader can avoid activities that deprive them of energy or that they do not enjoy doing. A Courageous Follower may also need to confront their leader and encourage them to make changes in how they allocate their time, which may mean delegate responsibilities that they like, but that are time consuming or could be done by the follower or someone else.

Courageous Followers in Chaleff's (2009) model serve their leader by how they interface with others within inside and outside of the organization. They may need to defend their leader if they are criticized by others. They may need to provide a buffer between their leader and others. They can help to address issues that can be resolved without action from the leader and they can gather information about emerging situations and determine when it is appropriate to discuss a concern with their leader. They can also serve as an effective buffer by explaining actions and motivations to other followers or leaders inside the organization as well as external stakeholders. They can help to provide context to a leader's decision that might be missing in a directive from the leader, but which is important to ensuring that the directive is implemented. Courageous Followers, particularly those who are a close aide to a leader, such as an "Assistant to," sometimes must act in the leader's name according to Chaleff (2009). In order to do this the follower must be well attuned to the leader's values and ways of thinking about particular situations. This is very useful in day-to-day operations, as well as when responding to a crisis.

Demonstrating *The Courage to Serve* may require a follower to assist the leader with personal relationships, according to Chaleff (2009). A follower may need to encourage the leader to build relationships with peers or seek out a mentor so that they have people in their lives, beyond those who work for them, who can provide feedback, advice, and support when needed. Courageous Followers also can play a role in maintaining positive relationships between leaders within an organization and helping to ask questions of their leader that will help to deescalate a conflict which can negatively impact the achievement of desired goals.

In Chaleff's (2009) model of followership a follower's style is determined, in part by the extent to which they challenge their leader. For Chaleff, *The Courage to Challenge* is a key to being a Courageous Follower. As mentioned previously, the leader and follower in Chaleff's model are united by a commitment to the common purpose. If a leader takes actions or fails to take action and as a result the common purpose of the leader and follower is in jeopardy, it is incumbent upon the follower to say something. If the follower fails to do so the organization can be negatively impacted, as well as the relationship between the leader and the follower.

A follower with *The Courage to Challenge* is willing and able to give feedback or input to their leader (Chaleff, 2009). Chaleff defines feedback as advice given to a leader after an action has been taken and he defines input as providing advice on actions that are being contemplated. When providing feedback, a Courageous Follower is skilled at preparing the leader for feedback and delivering feedback in a way that the leader will listen to what is being said. A Courageous Follower will focus on specific behaviors that are problematic and its effect on others or the organization. A Courageous Follower must also be able to determine when challenging the leader should be more indirect by asking questions that provide opportunities for reflection and dialogue. When providing input a Courageous Follower must be prepared to provide advice on pending actions or policies when the opportunity arises. Sometimes their input is not sought when it should have been. In these instances Chaleff advises that the follower needs to tactfully let the leader know that they wish to be consulted in the future.

In addition to challenging a leader, a Courageous Follower must also sometimes challenge a group or assist the leader to challenge another leader (Chaleff, 2009). With regard to challenging a group, a Courageous Follower may need to pose critical questions to move the group away from groupthink. For example, they may ask how the organization knows that they are superior to competitors, or whether they are using the most appropriate measures of success. They may also draw attention to environmental changes that can impact organizational success. With regard to assisting the leader to challenge another leader, there are times when a leader needs help being a Courageous Follower vis a vis the person they follow. This may mean that the Courageous Follower strategizes with her/his leader about how to broach a subject of interest with their leader's leader, which in student affairs is typically a provost or a president. They might offer to accompany the leader to a meeting with his or her superior to discuss the issue, or offer to raise the issue with the leader's leader directly.

Courageous Followers will sometimes have to have difficult conversations with their leader, but the intent is to help the leader and the organization excel (Chaleff, 2009). They may need to challenge a leader's use of offensive language, even if only used in private conversations between the leader and follower. They may also need to question the leader's use of euphemisms, such as downsizing, or reallocation rather than directly talking about firing or laying off people and cutting budgets. The euphemisms may send the wrong message to other followers about their understanding of the impact of their actions and decisions. Sometimes a follower has to challenge a leader about behavior that is inappropriate which could damage the reputation of the leader or the organization. According to Chaleff it is important for the follower to address these issues early so that they do not fester and potentially lead to larger problems that are more challenging to address in the future.

Despite the importance of challenging a leader, Chaleff (2009) asserts that a Courageous Follower also has a duty to obey their leader when a policy is adopted, unless it is an immoral one. He states "If we chose to continue being a follower of this leader and if the polices are not morally repugnant to us, we have the responsibility to implement the policies. We have the right to challenge policies in the policy-making process; we do not have the right to sabotage them in the implementation phase" (p. 98).

There are times when a follower needs to assist their leader or organization to transform. According to Chaleff (2009) "If a behavior threatens to overwhelm our larger purpose, we must find the skilled help to support a transformation effort, muster the courage to pursue it, and exert the discipline required to achieve transformation" (p. 116). He adds that "Transformation efforts should be attempted when a practice or behavior that violates the organization's values and threatens its purpose is so entrenched that it is barely understood to be a legitimate problem, let alone one of potentially catastrophic dimensions" (Chaleff, 2009, p. 116). Although Chaleff acknowledges that transformation may be needed at the leader or organizational level, he focuses mostly on discussing demonstrating *The Courage to Participate in Transformation* at the individual level. A Courageous Follower is one who recognizes the need for their leader to transform in some way. They notice behaviors or problems that indicate a need for a transformation. These might include increased staff turnover, decreased revenue, or the indications that the leader is not performing their role at an optimal level.

According to Chaleff (2009) the Courageous Follower should serve as a catalyst for transformation by helping the leader see the need for transformation. As they do this, according to Chaleff they must demonstrate empathy, as the leader will need support through this often difficult process. In some instances the leader's actions are causing organization problems which frustrate the leader and the follower, and the follower has to tactfully help the leader to realize that they are contributing to the problems that both of them dislike.

In addition to being a catalyst for transformation, a Courageous Follower must create a supportive environment where this transformation can occur (Chaleff, 2009). They have to help the leader see the willingness to transform as a strength and they need to be patient as the transformation happens. They need to help provide and identify resources to help in the transformation. In some instances this could mean providing resources related to improving team dynamics or clarifying the organization's values, vision and processes. Depending on the situation there may be a need to clarify the values and vision of the leader. There are times when the necessary transformation is related to a personal issue, such as substance abuse and the necessary resources include a rehabilitation program. As the follower helps to provide resources to their leader there may be occasions when it is beneficial to use individuals outside of the organization to help facilitate the needed transformation. One of the ways in which a Courageous Follower creates a supportive environment for transformation is by modeling its importance on a personal level. They should show their leader and others that they are willing to reflect on their own behavior and make appropriate changes. They can do this by demonstrating an openness to critical feedback about their performance and a willingness to discuss how their behavior may negatively impact others. According to Chaleff, a Courageous Follower who wants to help their leader or even their organization transform needs to make themselves vulnerable, which will facilitate the transformation.

According to Chaleff (2009), there are times when a follower, must have *The Courage to Take Moral Action*. This action may take many forms, but it "….is taken with the intention of bringing the actions of the leadership and organization into line with fundamental values that govern decent organizational behavior while preserving the capacity of the organization to fulfill its purpose" (Chaleff, 2009, 149). In Chaleff's (1995) original model of the Courageous Follower, *The Courage to Take Moral Action* was initially called *The Courage to Leave*. However, Dixon (2003), in his effort to operationalize Chaleff's model empirically, which resulted in *The Followership Profile,* discovered that the behavior which a follower demonstrates in challenging ethical situations is more complex than simply choosing to leave the organization. It also involves establishing a moral/ethical standard, validating concerns about situations that are bothersome, and the possible willingness to solicit the assistance of legal and/or regulatory authorities. He shared his findings with Chaleff who agreed to revise his model to its current form. *The Followership Profile* will be discussed in more detail later in this section.

*The Courage to Take Moral Action* is aligned with Kelley (1992) who introduced the idea of the "courageous conscience" in his model of followership. According to Kelley, followers with a courageous conscience effectively deal with moral issues by being able to tell the difference between right and wrong and to take the steps needed toward what is considered "right". The steps they may take are not limited to leaving the organization, which is what Dixon (2003) discovered and is reflected in Chaleff's (2009) current model.

Despite the broader nature of *The Courage to Take Moral Action*, leaving an organization is an option when there is a need for moral action due to a leader's decision or a significant shift in organizational direction or philosophy (Chaleff, 2009). If a follower considers leaving as a response to an action or situation that they find morally objectionable, they should take into account the impact that leaving will have on the organization, as well as themselves. They need to consider the financial repercussions of leaving and make appropriate contingencies. A Courageous Follower must be prepared to resign their position if needed. Chaleff in fact suggests that a follower discuss criteria for an eventual resignation early in their relationship. Doing so helps to clarify values in addition to helping to formulate guidelines that can be used when needed in the future if the follower should consider leaving the organization. Chaleff suggests that resigning can be used strategically in situations where *The Courage to Take Moral Action* comes into play. He asserts that in some instances threatening to resign is an action that a follower can take which may, in some instances, demonstrate the seriousness of the situation and lead to the desired change.

A Courageous Follower who is considering leaving their position should engage in the process of what Chaleff (2009) *query and appeal* before deciding to resign. A follower may query a decision by clarifying with their leader the intent of a policy that they oppose and determine whether the leader is aware of the moral implications of the proposed directive. The follower may inquire as to whether the leader had all of the information needed to make an informed decision. The follower may appeal a decision or policy by explicitly requesting that it be delayed, cancelled or reconsidered. In doing so they should state their reasons for opposition or suggest changes in the policy that will address their concerns.

Courageous Followers in Chaleff's (2009) model can take other meaningful moral actions other than leaving the organization. For example, they can withdraw their support from a leader, which sends a message to the leader and to others that there is an issue that must be addressed. A Courageous Follower may determine that the withdrawing their support is insufficient. They may decide that the situation warrants more scrutiny and they may decide to inform a higher authority, inside or outside of the organization, or in some instances the news media. When someone takes action such as this they become a "whistle blower", which is not something to be taken lightly. Although a Courageous

Follower may resort to whistle blowing, such as an action does not mean that someone is a Courageous Follower. Chaleff asserts that Courageous Followers are those who work with their leaders to remedy situations of concern. He acknowledges that some whistle blowers are disgruntled employees who did not try other means of addressing issues of concern. A Courageous Follower who resorts to reporting their leader's behavior to others is one who most likely has exhausted other ways of addressing with the issue of concern and has determined that failing to take this action will result in damage to the organization and/or others.

Chaleff (2009) states that when a follower is faced with making decisions about taking moral action they must look inward. They need to reflect on their values and on the actions that are of concern. They must consider the ramifications of the actions they might take and whether they are ready and willing to accept them. Chaleff acknowledges that in some instances, a follower, even one who may demonstrate Courageous Follower attributes, may decide to stay in an organization despite their objections to a leader and their actions. Sometimes the decision to stay is because of a worry about what will happen to the organization if they leave, and at other times is for more personal reasons. If a follower does choose to stay, Chaleff advises that they be ready to take bold action to reform the organization when the opportunity arises, and that they be willing to accept the moral and legal responsibility for continuing to support, tacitly or actually, a leader who has acted immorally.

When discussing *The Courage to Challenge,* Chaleff (2009) asserts that followers have a duty to support policies they may disagree with, unless they are morally repugnant. In those instances the "duty to obey" becomes a "duty to disobey." This is especially true if a policy violates common decency, undermines the organization's purpose, puts others at risk for physical harm, or is illegal. If a follower chooses to actively disobey a directive they should clearly articulate their reason for their decision and they should be prepared for the consequences if their decision was made in error or if there are negative outcomes for the leader, the organization and/or its members.

### *The Followership Profile*

*The Followership Profile* is an instrument that is used to measure Courageous Follower behaviors and was developed by Dixon (2003). This instrument was the result of Dixon's research which had two primary objectives: determining if there is an association between follower behaviors and organizational level, and demonstrating that followership can be empirically measured. Dixon created an instrument with the assistance of a panel of reviewers, including Ira Chaleff, the author of the Courageous Follower Theory, as well as focus groups. The instrument used in Dixon's study contained 56 questions and each Courageous Follower dimension was measured by at least seven questions. The survey was administered to a sample of 364 individuals who worked for 7-10 "U.S. businesses in the construction, engineering, and building services sector of industry providing engineering or technology-related services in the public sector" (Dixon, 2003, p. 47). Forty-four percent of those surveys responded, and 99% completed the entire survey.

The survey results indicated that four of the five Courageous Follower dimensions were demonstrated to greater degrees at higher organizational levels and that follower behavior could be empirically measured (Dixon, 2003). Dixon's study also established the reliability and validity of the instrument he created. With regard to reliability, Dixon used Cronbach's Alpha, which resulted in a .956 value for all 56 questions on the instrument, as well as the Spearman-Brown statistic, which resulted in a value of .936. Both of these values exceed the accepted value of .70. The validity of the instrument was tested in various ways, including the Gutman split-half procedure, which resulted in a value of .934. The overall validity of the instrument was established in multiple ways, including an extensive literature review, focus groups, and a review by Ira Chaleff. In order to establish construct validity a Confirmatory Factor Analysis was used and it determined that with the exception of one item, all of the hypothesized loadings were statistically significant. Criterion validity was established using pre-tests and pilots of the instrument which resulted in a criterion validity values of Spearman's Rho of .697 and Person Product Moment Correlation of r= .739, which indicates a large effect correlation for *The Followership Profile.* Dixon correlated scores from *The Followership Profile* with scores from The Self-assessment Textual Instrument. Participants were asked to use the latter instrument, which consisted of parenthetical descriptions of each of the five Courageous Follower dimensions, to self-assess them. Finally, the content validity of the instrument was established using several independent judges, including Ira Chaleff and one of his former colleagues.

**Research conducted using the Courageous Follower model.** *The Followership Profile* and the Courageous Follower model have been used in a variety of contexts in several recent dissertations, all of which were quantitative. For example, Ricketson (2008) used the instrument to study the relationship between leadership styles using the Transformational Leadership Model and Courageous Follower attributes. Eighty hourly employees and 21 managers who worked in five different nationally-known quick service restaurants participated in the study. The managers were surveyed using the Multi-factor Leadership Questionnaire to determine whether they displayed transformational, transactional or laissez-faire leadership styles, and *The Followership Profile* (Dixon, 2003) was administered to the hourly employees to determine which Courageous Follower attributes they demonstrated. Although the study did not find any significant correlations between transformational leadership style or transactional leadership style and Courageous Follower attributes, there were negative correlations between those leaders demonstrating a laissez-faire leadership style and their followers with regard to all five of the Courageous Follower attributes.

Fobbs (2010) used *The Followership Profile* (Dixon, 2003) to study the extent to which follower style (as explained in Kelley, 1992) is related to Courageous Follower attributes and the extent to which follower style is related to job satisfaction for hotel customer-contact employees. Fobbs surveyed 142 employees in a small hotel chain and 120 or 84.5% responded to the survey, which included *The Followership Profile* and *The Followership Questionnaire* (Kelley). The findings suggest that exemplary followers tended to display more of the attributes of a Courageous Follower than those with other followership styles.

Ray (2006) was the first person to use Dixon's (2003) instrument in research in a higher education context in a study of the relationship between hierarchal levels and measures of Courageous Follower behaviors among selected community college employees in North Carolina. Ray's study mirrored Dixon's (2003), and it is worth noting that Dixon was a member of Ray's dissertation committee. Ray administered *The Followership Profile* to 1,168 administrators in 57 of 58 community colleges in North

Carolina. The administrators were in one of the following three categories: Senior Administration (6%), Middle Administration (35%) and Lower Administration (59%). Thirty-five percent of those surveyed responded and 93% of those completed the survey. Forty-two percent of Middle Administrators, which included vice presidents, associate vice presidents and deans responded to the survey and 47% of the Lower Administrators surveyed, which included directors, department heads and coordinators responded. Only 11% of Senior Administrators, which included presidents and senior vice presidents responded.

Ray (2006) found that there was a statistically significant difference between the demonstration of each Courageous Follower attribute at each hierarchical level, except for *The Courage to Participate in Transformation.* Generally speaking the higher the hierarchical level, the higher the mean response for a specific Courageous Follower attribute. For Senior Administrators *The Courage to Serve* had the highest mean (4.20), whereas for Middle and Lower Administrators the highest mean was *The Courage to Participate in Transformation* (4.00 and 3.90 respectively. The Courageous Follower attribute with the lowest mean for Senior, Middle and Lower Administrators was *The Courage to Take Moral Action* (4.00, 3.81 and 3.71 respectively).

## Research Study

This study examined the applicability of Chaleff's (2009) Courageous Follower model to the role of staff who work in the "Assistant to" position for a senior student affairs officer (SSAO). As noted in Chapter 1, the research questions for this study are as follows:

1. How do Chaleff's five dimensions (and associated behaviors) of a Courageous Follower manifest themselves in the work of the "Assistant to" in student affairs organizations?
2. Are there additional behaviors displayed by those in the "Assistant to" role that are not included in Chaleff's model?
3. In the opinion of the "Assistant to" in student affairs in what ways does their role contribute to the organizational effectiveness and goal achievement of their respective student affairs organization?
4. In the opinion of the "Assistant to" in student affairs in what ways do they contribute to the success of the SSAO for whom they work?

# CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

## Research Design

The design of the study was qualitative. A qualitative design was chosen because it is best suited for research topics where there is little previous knowledge and where the focus is on the experiences and perceptions of the participants (Creswell, 2003; Merriam, 1998). As noted previously, there is little relevant literature on the role of the "Assistant to" in student affairs organizations despite the fact that the position is the most common cross-organizational specialist position in student affairs and is becoming more common (Tull & Rammell, 2012). What does exist is primarily descriptive in nature. With regard to the Courageous Follower model, there have been several recent studies using Chaleff's (2009) model, which will be discussed later, but none of them were qualitative and most were not focused on Courageous Followers in higher education institutions.

The study used the *generic qualitative study* strategy of inquiry to explore the identified research questions (Merriam, 1998). This strategy is commonly used when the primary desire of a research endeavor is "…to discover and understand a phenomenon, a process, or the perspectives and worldviews of the people involved" (p. 11). This approach is commonly used in education and does not seek to build a substantive theory, as is the case with grounded theory, or to explore a culture, as is the case with ethnography, but to identify recurring patterns in the data within a theoretical framework which might inform policy or practice (Merriam). Generic qualitative research typically exhibits some if not all of the qualities of other types of qualitative research, but does not limit itself to a specific methodology (Caelli, Ray, & Mill, 2003). In some instances a researcher combines multiple methodologies, and in some instances there is not an identifiable methodological viewpoint.

Generic qualitative studies are becoming increasingly more common, although there is not universal agreement on how to design and evaluate this type of research (Caelli, Ray, & Mill, 2003; Cooper & Endacott, 2007). However, Caelli et al. (2003) propose four areas key areas to be addressed when evaluating generic qualitative studies: the theoretical positioning of the researcher, the congruence between the proposed methodology and methods, the strategies to establish rigor, and the analytic lens through which the data are examined. The manner in which this study was conducted addressed the suggested criteria for evaluating generic qualitative research, as will be discussed below.

The theoretical position of the researcher refers to identifying "….the researcher's motives, presuppositions, and personal history that leads him or her toward, and subsequently shapes, a particularly inquiry" (Caelli, Ray, & Mill, 2003, p. 9). Later in this chapter I will discuss how I came to be interested in this topic, including acknowledging my work history as an "Assistant to" within student affairs at my current institution. I will also discuss steps that I took to inform potential subjects of why I was interested in this particular topic. Additionally, I will discuss how I used bracketing to ensure a more objective data collection and analysis process.

With regard to the rigor of this study, later in this chapter I will discuss my use of the data analysis approach associated with grounded theory. I also plan to use member checking to ensure that I am interpreting the data accurately (Merriam, 1998; Orcher, 2005). Additionally, in Appendix C I will present the interview questions, many of which are derived from *The Followership Profile* (Dixon, 2003), an instrument that has been tested for reliability and validity with regard to the Courageous Follower model. The interview questions were piloted with two knowledgeable colleagues in the field, known to the researcher, who have held or currently hold the position of “Assistant to.” I have been transparent by clearly articulating the criteria used to recruit and select potential subjects and determine who would be chosen to participate in the study. I believe that these steps will demonstrate that the study is a rigorous one.

With regard to congruence between the proposed methodology and methods, the perspective that knowledge is socially constructed guides study and impacted the chosen methods (Creswell, 2003). Using a semi-structured interview with open-ended questions as the primary method of data collection matches well my assumptions about knowledge. Creswell, for example notes that this particular method of gathering data is consistent with a Constructivist approach to knowledge. With regard to the analytic lens that was used for this study, consistent with the notion that knowledge is social constructed, I approached the analysis without any preconceived notions or hypotheses. I allowed the findings to emerge from the data and am transparent about ways in which the bias and perspectives that I bring as the sole collector and analyst of data may impact the interpretation of the data.

This study was uniquely suited for a generic qualitative research approach. Although grounded theory was initially considered as the strategy of inquiry, in retrospect it was not a good fit. Grounded theory is typically used to develop hypotheses based on the research (Merriam, 1998). The intended outcome of a grounded theory study would be to develop a “substantive theory” that has application to real world situations (Merriam). The findings of this study will hopefully inform practice, as well as future research, but this study did not seek to develop a theory. Rather it sought to understand an experience, which is a common use of this approach (Caelli, Ray, & Mill, 2003). It sought to explore a largely unexplored administrative position that is increasingly common within student affairs organizations, which is not addressed sufficiently by existing literature. This study, using Chaleff's (2009) model of the Courageous Follower as a theoretical framework, sought to explore the impact that the "Assistant to" has on their organization and their SSAO, in addition to exploring the extent to which those in this role exhibit the behavioral attributes of a Courageous Follower. Given the intent of this study, the generic qualitative research approach was determined to be the optimal one.

There are a number of strengths and weaknesses to using a qualitative design for this study. Strengths include the ability to focus on the experiences of individuals and to identify common themes from the various participants that will help to understand the role of the "Assistant to" in student affairs specifically. Weaknesses associated with a qualitative design include a lack of generalizability of the findings and a lack of statistical data. However, the strengths of the study will assist in discovering useful knowledge that can serve as a foundation for future research endeavors, including qualitative and quantitative ones.

**Human Subjects Approval**

This study was approved by the University of Minnesota Institutional Review Board for the Projection of Human Subjects (IRB) in January 2015 and I was exempt from a full review by the IRB. Due to the nature of the study and the proposed questions, it was not necessary to obtain written consent from participants. However, I was required to provide them with a Consent Information Sheet prior to the interview, which I did.

**Acknowledging Researcher Perspective**

In qualitative research, the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis (Merriam, 1998). Given the unique role of the researcher in qualitative research, it is critical that the researcher reflect on his/her experiences and beliefs related to the research and be transparent about his/her connection to the research in question (Creswell, 2003, Orcher, 2005). As a result, it is very important for the researcher to avoid any unacknowledged influences related to the topic that might impact the research process. It is important that the researcher be transparent throughout the research process so that personal biases do not impact negatively impact the eventual research findings.

Therefore I should note that my first professional position was within student affairs as the "Assistant to" the Vice President for Student Affairs, at a large, public institution in the Midwest and I have worked for ten years as the Chief of Staff (another cross-organizational specialist position) within student affairs at the same institution, although I now have a different role within the institution. I have also worked as an "Assistant to" outside of student affairs at the same institution. Over the years I have developed a strong interest in this role and its place within student affairs, specifically, and higher education generally.

As part of my professional development when I worked in student affairs, I regularly attended the annual NASPA conference and I was part of an informal professional network of staff who have titles such as "Assistant to," "Special Assistant to," or "Chief of Staff" as well as other specialty roles within student affairs. Some members of this network participate in a formal meeting during the annual conference to network and discuss common issues, and I often attended those meetings. Although I have come to know some of these individuals professionally over the years, those who might have been eligible to participate in the study are no longer in "Assistant to" roles, although they may serve in other specialist capacities within their organization. However, I used one of these individuals to pilot the interview protocol that will be described later.

During this research process I engaged in self-disclosure and bracketing in order to enhance transparency (Orcher, 2005). With regard to self-disclosure, in addition to disclosing my interest and relation to this area of inquiry here, I disclosed similar information with potential participants as part of the recruitment process. Bracketing is a process by which the researcher sets "…aside any personal beliefs and concerns in order to be able to view the phenomena under investigation from the point of view of the participants" (Orcher, 2005, p. 161). As the researcher I bracketed my beliefs and perspectives throughout the data collection. For example, during interviews I refrained from referring to my own personal experience when collecting information from participants. I bracketed my beliefs and perspectives during most of the analysis process. As discussed earlier in this chapter, I used Analytic Memos to summarize each interview after they were coded, and in those memos I reflected on areas where my own experience found agreement with that of the participant. At various points in Chapter Five when I discussed the research findings I used my professional experience as a way of interpreting the findings. In order to prevent my personal experiences from impacting this study in an inappropriate way, I took care to ensure that the voices shared in the study as the findings are presented are those of the participants, and not mine. Any themes identified emerged inductively in response to my interview questions and were not predetermined by me. In fact, I did not begin thinking about themes until after the coding of an interview was completed and then, only in the context of developing the Analytic Memo for each interview.

**Data Collection**

This study used interviews as the primary method of data collection, although participants were also asked to provide a written copy of their job description as a secondary data collection method. Interviews were ideal for this study because they are most useful when there is interest in past behavior, thoughts and feelings that cannot be observed (Merriam, 1998). Interviews have many advantages which make them a useful tool for gathering data. For example, interviews provide opportunities to insert follow-up questions to glean additional information. Additionally, unlike most surveys, interviews typically do not put constraints on the person responding, which can lead to collecting richer data. There are several disadvantages to interviews that should be noted. For example, interviews are very labor intensive with regard to the time it takes to conduct each interview, as well as the time needed to analyze the data. (Watson, 1997). Another disadvantage is that interviews can present challenges when the subjects are dispersed geographically, which can limit the ability to include them in a research study due to financial and time constraints. This was a concern for this particular study since the potential subjects were in colleges and universities around the nation.

For this particular study, the advantages of interviews outweigh the disadvantages. Although interviews take time to conduct and analyze the data, the relative newness of this topic presents the possibility of unearthing useful data that will benefit the field of student affairs. Although the possibility of conducting interviews remotely using Skype or Face-time was explored, it was not feasible due to challenges with recording the interviews. As a result, I decided to conduct interviews remotely using a telephone. According to Opdenakker (2006) telephone interviewing has several advantages, including the ability to interview individuals who are dispersed geographically, which can be a challenge with face-to-face interviews.

There are a variety of different ways of conducting interviews, ranging from being very informal with regard to the way questions are asked, to having a set of questions that are always asked and always asked in the same way (Merriam, 1998). There are pros and cons to each method. I decided to use a semi-structured interview approach, which is ideal for qualitative studies of this nature and which allowed the study to benefit from the positive attributes of informal or unstructured interviews and structured ones (Merriam).

A semi-structured approach includes a combination of specific questions, as well as more general questions and issues that should be explored that can be phrased in different ways depending on responses given by the participants during the interview process (Orcher, 2005). This method of data gathering makes it possible to take into account the unique experiences and worldviews of the participants. It also allows for follow-up questions based on the responses of the interview subjects, which is difficult to do in highly structured interviews (Watson, 1997). This type of interview format also prevents biases related to the researcher's preconceived notions that are more common with a more structured interview approach. While many of the questions used for this study were asked using the same wording since they are based on an instrument, *The Followership Profile* (Dixon, 2003), which was designed to assess Courageous Follower attributes, the order in which they are asked is flexible depending on responses during the interview.

In order to maximize the value of the information obtained during an interview there are several steps that an interviewer can take. It is very important to design questions that will prevent “yes” or “no” answers, as such answers are not particularly useful in a qualitative study (Merriam, 1998). It is also important to design questions that are neutral, that do not contain multiple questions in one (Merriam; Watson, 1997). Questions that are biased will taint the data and may encourage the interviewer to respond in a way that they believe will align with the perspective of the interviewer. Questions that are actually multiple questions presents challenges when it is time to interpret the response. It is important to pilot test potential interview questions with individuals who can provide useful feedback that can help revise the questions if needed. Piloting the interview is an important step in the research process and enables the interviewer to practice interviewing, in addition to allowing her/him to test the questions (Watson). It is important to schedule enough time for an interview so it does not have to end before all of the questions have been asked. It is also important to avoid scheduling back-to-back interviews in case an interview exceeds the allotted time and so that the interviewer has time to write down any notes that are of value while the interview is still fresh in their mind (Watson).

During the actual interview it is important to establish a rapport with the subject, and to treat them with respect, kindness and courtesy (Watson, 1997). This will be even more so important because the interviews will be done remotely. Before the interview and during it I clearly stated that the interview will be confidential and articulated the steps that will be taken to avoid identifying the interviewee and attributing any comments to them in such a way that identifies them or their institution. For example, interview subjects were given pseudonyms to replace their names. Institutions are only referred to by their general size and location (e.g., an institution between 10,000 and 20,000 located in the Midwest), and the age, race and gender of interviewees were not used in a way that enables them to be identified. Specific situations that were discussed were only described in vague terms to protect the confidentiality of the interview subject.

In order to enhance the analysis of data that comes from the interview, the interviews were recorded. There are many advantages to recording interviews, including avoiding the distractions of taking notes during the interview, and being able to provide a complete and accurate record of the interview that is free of interpretation (Watson, 1997). Additionally, recording the interview allows the interviewer to hear how he/she behaved during the interview and determine if changes should be implemented in future interviews. There are a number of disadvantages to recording interviews, including the time it takes to transcribe the interview, and a reluctance of interviewees to speak as freely as they might have if the conversation was not being recorded (Watson). Recording the interview had the potential to raise concerns about the confidentiality of the interview, but I took steps to proactively allay those concerns clearly when the interview was scheduled and again at the start of the interview.

**Source of interview questions regarding the Courageous Follower model.** As noted above many of the interview questions were based on items used in *The Followership Profile*, (Dixon, 2003), an instrument used to measure the extent to which an individual exhibits the five Courageous Follower dimensions. Participants were asked

10 questions related to the five dimensions of the Courageous Follower model and two questions had multiple parts to which the participant could respond (See Appendix C). If each of those two questions were asked separately participants would have answered a total of 16 questions related to the five Courageous Follower dimensions. Nine of those questions were based on items  from *The Followership Profile.* For example, participants were asked “In what ways have you demonstrated your ability to assume more responsibility for the organization by initiating ideas and actions on your own?” *The Followership Profile* asks the subject to indicate to what extent they do the following: “Takes initiative without formal responsibility.” Participants were asked “In what ways have you advised your SSAO about concerns that your personal values and principles might be threatened or compromised?” *The Followership Profile* asks the subject to indicate to what extent they do the following: “Advises his or her manager of concern for threated personal values and principles.’

Chaleff’s (2009) assertions regarding the important behaviors of each of the Courageous Follower dimensions were used to determine the other six questions used to explore Courageous Follower model. For example, participants were asked “In what ways have you demonstrated that you can discern when you can speak or act for your SSAO and when you need to consult with them first?” Chaleff asserts in the beginning of the chapter that discusses the Courage to Serve:

> It is also the epitome of judgement in serving a leader: knowing when you can speak for the leader and when you had better consult her. It takes courage to serve as a close aide to a senior leader. If you bother your leader with too many matters, you will squander their energy; if you fail to bring things that they need to know to their attention, you may blindside them….(p. 57).

## Participants

**Participant criteria.** I used purposive sampling in order to identify 15 participants for this study. Purposive sampling is useful when the researcher wishes to "discover, understand, and gain insight" and thus must select a sample that enables them to learn as much as possible (Merriam, 1998, p. 61). In order to be a considered a candidate for this study, the potential participate had to match the selection criteria listed below:

1. Currently serve as an "Assistant to" for a senior student affairs officer (and report directly to that person) for at least one year for the same individual;
2. Work at a public, four-year institution of higher education in the United States;
3. Not have taken *The Followership Profile*, the instrument used to measure Courageous Follower behaviors previously; and
4. Not be personally acquainted with the researcher

The criteria that were used to select participants were all intended to help enhance the quality of the study and the usefulness of its findings. The first criterion set parameters on the research study. Within student affairs organizations, there may be a variety of individuals with the "Assistant to" title, but I wanted to focus on those who report directly to an SSAO. In order to have productive and informative interviews it is important that the participants have a significant amount of experience in their current position and working with their current SSAO. This will enable the participants to hopefully have a deep pool of experiences on which to draw from when answering the various questions asked of them. Since the "Assistant to" position is most prevalent at public, four-year institutions it made sense to limit participants to those institutions. In order to prevent personal experience from tainting the research process it is preferable to have participants who are not familiar with the instrument that will be used to generate several of the questions that they were asked in the interviews. It is also preferable to not have participants with whom I have a personal relationship with, since that might impact the interviews, the data analysis process, and the credibility of the findings.

**Participant recruitment.** In order to identify potential participants, I sought the assistance of a colleague who I met through NASPA (National Association of Student Personnel Administrators), the largest student affairs professional organization. She has worked as an "Assistant to" an SSAO in a previous position, and helps to convene an annual meeting of staff who work in the "Assistant to" or other cross-organizational specialist roles during NASPA's annual conference. She also helped to plan a half-day pre-conference seminar for staff who work as an "Assistant to" or in similar positions several years ago which took place at NASPA. I asked her to send an email invitation to the list serve that she maintains for staff who work in "Assistant to" or similar positions. This email was sent on January 22, 2015. The criteria for participation were included in the message sent to members (See Appendix D) and interested participants were instructed to complete an online form to express their interest. While that effort generated many participants, I needed to identify additional ones. In order to do that I sent emails to more than 50 individuals who were identified as working as an "Assistant to" an SSAO on their institution's student affairs website. In order to identify males to participate in the study, I asked the colleague mentioned above to promote my study during a meeting of staff who work as "Assistant's to" and related roles during the 2015 NASPA annual conference, which took place in March 2015. All of these efforts contributed to the group of 15 participants who were interviewed. I should note that although one of the criteria to participate in the research study was to have worked for their current SSAO for at least one year, I made an exception in order to recruit at least one male to the study. He had worked in his position for approximately eight months at the time of the interview.

**Participant demographics.** All participants were female, except for one. Ten of the participants worked for male SSAO and five worked for female ones. Twelve of the participants were white and three were members of minority groups, including individuals of African, Asian-Pacific Islander, and Latino descent. With regard to age, six participants were in their late 30s, three were in their early 40s, two were in their late 50s, and one each was in their mid-40s, mid-30s, early 30s, and mid-20s. There was a wide range of work experience represented among the participants; one had been in their current position for only eight months, while others had been in their position for 17 years. Several participants have worked for multiple SSAOs as an “Assistant to.” With regard to titles, eight of the participants had the generic “Assistant to” the SSAO (i.e., vice president, vice chancellor, Dean of Students) title, and seven had an “Assistant to” title that indicated specific duties and/or that they were a “Special Assistant to” their SSAO. The highest level of attainment of the participants included two individuals who had a Bachelor’s degree, four individuals who had a doctorate in a higher education-related field, eight individuals who had a Master’s degree in a higher education-related field, and one individual who had a Master’s degree in another field.

Participants worked at a variety of institutions based on student enrollment and location. Seven worked at institutions with between 10,000 and 20,000 students, five worked at institutions with between 30,000 and 40,000 students, and two worked at institutions with less than 10,000 students, and one worked at an institution with between 20,000 and 30,000 students, The institutions represented included five schools from the Southeast (i.e., Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, Washington D.C., West Virginia), four schools from the Midwest (i.e., Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Wisconsin), three schools from the West (i.e., California, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, Washington, Wyoming), two schools from the Northeast (i.e., Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island), one school from the Southwest (i.e., Arizona, Texas, New Mexico, Oklahoma).

**Procedure**

Once selected to participate in this study, participants were scheduled for an interview lasting 60 minutes. Interviews began on February 19, 2015 and were conducted through March 18, 2015. When I emailed the participants to schedule an interview I also asked them to provide a copy of their job description and to indicate whether they read the Consent Information Sheet (Appendix E) required by the University's Institutional Review Board. When confirming the interview a week before the interview was to take place, I restated my request for a copy of the job description and/or their indication that they had read the Consent Information Sheet if appropriate. I also let them know that when I called them for their interview I would ask for them using their pseudonym rather than their real name. Since the participants worked at institutions around the nation the interviews took place remotely using a cellphone. The interviews were recorded using an app on my cellphone called *Total Recall* which records phone calls. At the beginning of the interview I stated the purpose of the interview, let the participant know how many questions they would be asked, and asked if they had any questions. At the beginning of the interview and at various times during the interview I also advised participants that there might be some questions that they could not answer. The duration of the interviews ranged from approximately 52 minutes to approximately 69 minutes.

Two pilot interviews were conducted in February 2015 with two staff who are acquainted with me who have served or currently serve as an “Assistant to” an SSAO in student affairs. After the pilot interviews the questions were revised somewhat, and several more were added since both pilot interviews were completed with a significant amount of time left over. As stated previously, many of the questions asked were based on questions that are asked on *The Followership Profile* (Dixon, 2003), although with phrasing to evoke an answer that would result in specific examples.

**Data Analysis**

Although the interviews were recorded and transcribed, I took some notes during the interview process to summarize key points and any apparent theoretical implications. All interviews were transcribed following the interview by another person who did not know the identity of the person being interviewed. Following the receipt of the transcripts I followed the guidance of Creswell, 2003) who suggested that organizing and preparing the data for analysis is the first step in the analysis process. I reviewed the transcripts following the completion of the interviews and I corrected any mistakes that I noticed. The transcriptionist noted any parts of the recording where she was not exactly sure what was said with a specific timestamp. I used the audio recording of the interview to fill in the missing text. Following the transcription of all of the interviews, I read the transcripts, but I did not make any notes, other than to fix obvious errors. My intention in doing this was to "obtain a *general sense* of the information and to reflect on its overall meaning" as suggested by Creswell (p. 191).

Toward the end of my data collection phase I developed a Data Analysis Plan to guide my efforts. This plan articulated the steps that I would take to analyze the data, including the specific types of coding that I would employ. As noted earlier in this chapter, although I am using a generic qualitative research strategy, in order to provide rigor to the study I used a grounded theory approach to code and analyze the data even though my study was not seeking to develop a theory. As Saldana (2013) notes, the grounded theory process "…usually involves meticulous analytic attention by applying specific types of codes to data through a series of cumulative coding cycles that ultimately lead to the development of a theory – a theory "grounded" or rooted in the original data themselves" (p. 51). Part of the data analysis process within grounded theory includes the use of the constant comparative method (Merriam, 1998). This method involves comparing one segment of data with another segment in order to determine if there are similarities or differences. I used this method after the initial process to code the data was completed. The coding aspect of my data analysis process will be discussed below.

Within grounded theory there are several coding methods that are typically used, including In Vivo, Process, Initial or Open, Axial, and Theoretical coding (Saldana, 2013). Saldana advises that the coding methods selected should match the intended study. He states "Depending on the nature and goals of your study, you may find that one coding method alone will suffice, or that two or more are needed to capture the complex processes or phenomena in your data" (p. 60). Saldana presents coding methods into two categories—First Cycle and Second Cycle. First Cycle methods are those which take place during the initial coding of the data, and Second Cycle methods are those used after the initial coding and can be more challenging because they "…require such analytic skills as classifying, prioritizing, integrating, synthesizing, abstracting, conceptualizing, and theory building" (p. 58).

My Data Analysis plan consisted of both First and Second Cycle methods. I used four First Cycle coding methods during the first stage of analyzing the data: Attribute Coding, Subcoding, In Vivo Coding, and Initial Coding. *Attribute Coding* (which is also called Descriptive Coding) consists of notations, usually at the beginning of the data set (i.e., the transcript) that summarizes descriptive information such as demographics of the participants (Saldana, 2013). I used Attribute Coding to note demographic information about the participants, including race/ethnicity, gender, and highest degree obtained. I also noted how long they had worked in their current position, at their institution, and within student affairs, as well as their title. Finally I noted the size of their institution and its location, using a range (e.g. 10,000-20,000) and a region (e.g., Midwest). *Subcoding* is the use of "…a second-order tag assigned after a primary code to detail or enrich the entry, depending on the volume of data you have or specificity you need for categorization and data analysis" (p. 77). I used this method particularly when coding responses related to specific Courageous Follower dimensions and the associated behaviors that were explored. This enabled me to code examples of how a participant defended their SSAO or the ways that they demonstrated initiative. *In Vivo Coding* refers to a coding process that uses a word or short phrase from the data as the code (Saldana, 2013). The intent of this type of coding is to use the actual words of the participants. *Initial Coding* (sometimes called Open Coding) allows the researcher to break down the qualitative data into discrete parts, which can then be closely examined and compared for similarities and differences (Saldana, 2013).

After coding each interview using the methods noted above, I wrote an Analytic Memo for each interview. This memo provided an opportunity to reflect on the coding process, and to begin to identify any emergent categories, themes, and patterns. It is also an opportunity to determine if there should be changes in questions asked in future interviews, as well as identifying limitations to the study (Saldana, 2013). The memos that I created posed specific questions, including “How do I relate to their experience?”, “What have I learned related to my research questions?”, “What are the emergent patterns, themes, assertions, etc.?” and “What are the problems with my study?” After concluding the coding for all of the interviews and finishing the Analytic Memos, I created a summary memo based on all of the interviews. As mentioned previously I also requested job descriptions from the participants. I coded the job descriptions using In Vivo and Initial coding methods and created a summary Analytic Memo with my findings.

I used Focused Coding during the Second Cycle phase of my data analysis process. The primary goal of the Second Cycle phase is to “develop a sense of categorical, thematic, conceptual, and/or theoretical organization from your array of First Cycle codes” (Saldana, 2013, p. 207). *Focused Coding* is a streamlined version of Axial Coding that is commonly used with Grounded Theory. When using Focused Coding the researcher looks for the codes that are most frequent or significant in order to develop categories (Saldana, 2013). During this time the researcher has to determine which of the initial codes make the most sense analytically.

To facilitate Focused Coding, I created two documents. Document #1 included all of the codes that were used during the coding process, and Document #2 included all of the codes, but were categorized based on what part of the interview the codes were created. For example, in the Document #2, codes related to the Courage to Serve were placed in one category, codes related to the participant's discussion of their experience as an "Assistant to" were placed in another. Within the categories that explored specific Courageous Follower dimensions, I also noted the behaviors associated with each of the codes. For example, within the codes related to the Courage to Serve, I noted which ones related to defending the SSAO, serving as a gatekeeper, and speaking for or acting on the SSAO's behalf. I placed most of the codes within each question into categories. There were some codes that related to questions that were not always asked in each interview, or based on comments that were made as the interview was concluding. Using Document #1, I placed all of the codes into broad categories, based on the codes, rather than the questions asked. For example, all of the codes that related to providing information to their SSAO or others within their organization were placed in the same category.

These two documents allowed me to identify categories within each of the study's research questions, including the behaviors associated with each Courageous Follower dimension. This process also allowed me to identify broader categories of responses that cut across the various research questions, allowed me to identify themes within each of the research questions in the context of the Courageous Follower model, and allowed me to identify which behaviors of the Courageous Follower model were most likely to be demonstrated by the participants.

With regard to the study as a whole, the data analysis process that I used resulted in the emergence of one primary theme-the importance of relationships, and four sub-themes—the importance of relationships between "Assistant to" and the SSAO, the importance of relationships between the "Assistant to" and others within the organization and institution, how relationships between the "Assistant to" and the SSAO manifest themselves, the role of trust and honesty in those relationships. Relationships facilitate two primary roles played by the "Assistant to" and two related roles. These themes and roles will be discussed in more detail in Chapters Four and Five.

After I completed the coding process I engaged in member-checking by sharing copies of the transcripts with the participants to verify their accuracy. Five participants responded and one had a minor edit to suggest. I also asked if they would like to provide any additional information in the event that someone occurred to them after the interview, but none of them did so.

In addition to the coding process described above, I used a number of other qualitative data analysis methods to help articulate the eventual findings. Enumeration was used to give the reader an idea of the frequency of particular responses (Orcher, 2005). As appropriate representative quotations are used to demonstrate key points in the results section of this study (Orcher, 2005).

# CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

In this chapter I will provide information about the participants in the study, as well as summarize responses from their interviews related to their job duties and their experience working as an "Assistant to" for a SSAO. Then I will present the findings from this study within the context of the study's four research questions. I will also present findings regarding themes and roles which emerged from the data analysis process that are not related to a particular research question. The themes and roles emerged from responses given at various points in the participant interviews.

As the findings are presented it is important to note I have taken steps to protect the anonymity of those who participated in this study. For example, there are several instances where descriptions of situations are intentionally vague. There are also instances where there are no references to the participant's pseudonym or their gender because the example used might make it easier to connect the response with an actual person. When referring to the institution where a person works, only a region of the country will be used (e.g., Midwest) and the school's population will be presented as a range (e.g., between 10,000 and 20,000). When referring to the age of the participant, their age is also presented without given the specific age, but by using approximations (e.g., mid-thirties). When referring to a person's degree, I will indicate whether it is in a higher education-related field or not, but I will not use the specific name of the degree. While most participants had generic titles such as "Assistant to the Vice President," a few had more specific titles that identified particular aspects of their responsibilities. I have chosen not to use any of those titles when referring to participants. Finally, I will use the terms "Vice President" or "VP" as generic terms to refer to SSAOs in any quotes or references to the SSAO position that follow in this chapter and the next. Not using the titles of those who worked for Vice Chancellors or Deans of Students will help protect the confidentiality of those who participated in interviews.

## The Participants

As noted previously 15 individuals participated in this research study. Each of them was in an “Assistant to” position at the time of their interview, reporting directly to a Senior Student Affairs Officer (e.g., Vice President, Vice Chancellor, or Dean of Students) at the time of the interview. Below I will provide brief background information about the participants in order to provide context to their comments that will follow later in this chapter. A summary of this information is also presented in Table 1 on page 151. Information about one participant, Joseph, is presented slightly differently than other participants in order to ensure his anonymity.

Table 1

*Characteristics of "Assistant to" Interviewees*

| **Name** | **Race** | **Highest Degree** | **Years in Student Affairs** | **Years in Position** | **Size of Institution** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Angela | White | Master's in Higher Ed-related field | 10 | 7 | 10-20K |
| Denise | White | Ph.D. in Higher Ed-related field | 10 | 5 | Less than 10K |
| Erica | White | Bachelor's in non-Higher Ed-related field | 3 | 6 | 10-20K |
| Jennifer | White | Master's in Higher Ed-related field | 4 | 2 | 10-20K |
| Jill | White | Bachelor's in non-Higher Ed-related field | 5 | 1 | 30-40K |
| Joseph | Person of color | Master's in Higher Ed-related field | 10+ | | 10-20K |
| Kerry | Mexican-American | Ph.D. in Higher Ed-related field | 15 | 9 | 30-40K |
| Lisa | White | Master's in Higher Ed-related field | 10 | 7 | 10-20K |
| Maria | White | Master's in non-Higher Ed-related field | 5 | 3.5 | 30-40K |
| Mary | White | Master's in Higher Ed-related field | 19 | 17 | 30-40K |
| Megan | White | Master's in Higher Ed-related field | 19 | 7.5 | 10-20K |
| Michelle | White | Master's in Higher Ed-related field | 5.5 | 5.5 | 30-40K |
| Monique | African descent | Master's in Higher Ed-related field | 10 | 4 | 10-20K |
| Tanya | White | Ed.D. in Higher Ed-related field | 15 | 2 | 20-30K |
| Vanessa | White | Ed.D. in Higher Ed-related field | 16 | 2.5 | Less than 10K |

**Angela** is a white female who is in her late thirties and works at an institution in the Southwest which has between 10,000 and 20,000 students. She holds a Master's degree in a higher education-related field and is pursuing a doctoral degree. Angela has worked in various student affairs roles at her current institution for ten years and she has been in her current position for seven. She has supported three different individuals who served as the SSAO for her institution. Her position has evolved over time and changed with the needs of the various vice presidents with whom she worked. Currently, her primary responsibilities include providing advocacy and support for students, in addition to overseeing operational areas such as human resources.

**Denise** is a white female who is in her early forties, has a doctoral degree in a higher education-related field, and works at an institution in the Southeast with fewer than 10,000 students. She has worked within student affairs for ten years, and has worked in her current position for five years. Her primary duties include overseeing assessment for her student affairs division.

**Erica** is a white female who is in her late thirties, has a Bachelor's degree and is pursuing a Master's degree in a higher education-related field. Erica works at an institution in the West with between 10,000 and 20,000 students. She has been working in student affairs for three years, and has worked as an "Assistant to" for six years, both inside and outside of student affairs. She has worked for several SSAOs since she began working in student affairs. Her primary responsibilities include managing the vice president's calendar, coordinating special projects and events, and managing budgets for the division.

**Jennifer** is a white female who is in her mid-twenties, has a Master's degree in a higher education-related field, and works at a school in the Midwest with between 10,000 and 20,000 students. She was worked within student affairs for four years and in her current role for two years. Her primary responsibilities include managing her vice president's calendar, benchmarking her institution against other high education institutions, and coordinating various initiatives.

**Jill** is a white female in her late fifties who has a Bachelor's degree and works at an institution in the Midwest with between 30,000 and 40,000 students. She has worked in various positions at her institution over a period of seven years, including five years within student affairs and one year in her current role. In a previous position, she also supported the Dean of Students, who reported to the SSAO. Her primary responsibilities include managing the SSAO's calendar, arranging travel, and providing support to other administrators within her student affairs division.

**Joseph** is a male of person of color, who has a Master's degree in a higher education-related field and is pursuing a doctoral degree in a higher education-related field. Joseph works at an institution in the Northeast with a student body of between 10,000 and 20,000. He has worked within student affairs for more than ten years. His primary duties include oversight of budgeting and communications.

**Kerry** is a Latina female who is in her late thirties, has a doctorate in a higher education-related field and works at an institution in the West with between 30,000 and 40,000 students. She has worked within the field of student affairs for 15 years and has spent nine years at her current institution in her current role. Her position has evolved over time and her primary role currently is to oversee special projects and initiatives for the division, although she does have a few units which report to her.

**Lisa** is a white female who is in her late fifties, has a Master's degree in a higher education-related field and works at an institution in the Northeast with between 10,000 and 20,000 students. She has worked within the student affairs field for 10 years and has been in her current role for seven years. Her primary responsibilities include strategic planning, budget oversight, and human resources.

**Maria** is a white female who is in her late thirties, has a Master's degree in field not related to higher education, and works at an institution in the Midwest which has between 30,000 and 40,000 students. She has worked within the field of student affairs for five years, and has been in her current role for approximately three and a half years. Her primary duties include managing human resources, budget, communications, and technology functions for her student affairs division.

**Mary** is a white female who is in her mid-forties, has a Master's degree in a higher education-related field, and works at an institution in the Southeast which has between 30,000 and 40,000 students. She has worked within the field of student affairs for 19 years and in her current role for 17. Her primary responsibilities include working on special projects and overseeing communications and marketing.

**Megan** is a white female who is in her early forties, has a Master's degree in a higher education-related field, and works at an institution in the Midwest which has between 10,000 and 20,000 students. She has worked within the student affairs field for 19 years and in her current position for seven. Her primary duties include leading strategic planning and marketing efforts for the division.

**Michelle** is a white female in her early thirties, who has a Master's degree in a higher education-related field, and works at an institution in the Southeast with a student body between 30,000 and 40,000. She has worked within student affairs for approximately five and a half years and has been in her current position for the same amount of time. Her primary duties include overseeing assessment and retention.

**Monique** is a female of African descent who is in her late thirties, has a Master's degree in a higher education-related field, and who works at an institution in the Southeast that has between 10,000 and 20,000 students. She has worked within student affairs for ten years and has been in her current position for four years. Her primary duties include assisting students and their parents, as well as other duties which support the vice president, such as writing reports and processing incoming correspondence.

**Tanya** is a white female in her mid-thirties who has a doctorate in a higher education-related field and works at an institution in the Southeast which has between 20,000 and 30,000 students. She has worked at several institutions in various capacities and has spent more than 15 years in the student affairs field. She has been in her current position for a little more than two years. Her primary responsibilities include working with students whose behavior is concerning to the institution, supporting families, and compiling the annual report for her student affairs division.

**Vanessa** is a white female who is in her early forties, has a doctorate in a higher education-related field, and works at an institution in the West which has less than 10,000 students. She has worked within student affairs for more than 15 years and has worked in her current role for approximately two and a half years. Her primary responsibilities include assessment, retention, and student communication.

**Job Responsibilities**

In order to learn more about the job responsibilities of the study participants all participants were asked to provide a current job description, and 13 complied with this request. In addition, all participants were also asked to describe their position in their own words during the interviews. There was a great deal of consistency between the job descriptions and how the participants described their positions, although several of them discussed aspects of their positions not included in the job description. The most common job duties were those associated with core functions of a student affairs division, including communication and assessment. Based on their position descriptions, six of the participants had communication as a key part of their position. This number includes those participants who were responsible for overseeing communication and marketing for their division, those charged with overseeing student communication, as well as those charged with producing annual reports, brochures, speeches, and other documents on behalf of the division or the vice president. Four of the participants had assessment as a core part of their job description, including one person who had assessment as a primary responsibility.

Six participants had special projects listed as one of the job responsibilities in their job descriptions. One participant's position was focused mostly on special projects and for two others, overseeing special projects was listed among their top three duties. Many participants used terms such as "generalist" and "utility player" to describe their work. In addition to the mention of special projects in job descriptions, "other duties as assigned" was included in four of the job descriptions. Based on the job descriptions, as well as the comments from participants, other areas of responsibilities included:

overseeing strategic planning, budgeting, technology, human resources (including managing searches and professional development), and providing support for students and their families. Three of the participants indicated that they had responsibilities for maintaining their vice president's schedule, and in only one instance was this their primary responsibility. Although this individual had the title of Assistant to the Vice President, based on the job description she would be considered an executive assistant or a similar title in most student affairs organizations.

As mentioned previously, several participants described their role in ways that were not mentioned in their job descriptions. For example, a few highlighted their role with regard to specific policy issues such as Title XI (a Federal law that prohibits discrimination on the basis of gender in Federally funded education programs, which includes regulations regarding how institutions of higher education handle sexual assault cases), retention, and on-campus tobacco use. Some participants described themselves as sounding boards or confidantes for their SSAO. Others mentioned being a "problem solver", providing resources to units within their division, and interpreting the vice president's decisions for staff within the division as a core part of their job.

**Experience as an "Assistant to"**

During their interview all of the participants were asked to describe their experience working as an "Assistant to." Participants predominantly discussed their work in positive terms, although some did mention challenges that they faced. Six participants specifically stated that they enjoyed their job and three stated that they loved their job. The remaining six participants did not use either of those two words when they described their experience as an "Assistant to." There were a variety of reasons given for why those who said they "loved" or enjoyed" their job felt that way, including the variety of work the position provided, the ability to work with students, the broad perspective of student affairs that they gained from the position, and the ability to work with senior student affairs leaders and others on important issues. Several participants also mentioned they saw the position as a great learning opportunity.

Despite the fact that most of the participants spoke in positive terms about their experience as an "Assistant to," there were a number of challenges identified. Four of the participants mentioned the lack of authority they have over their director peers (e.g., those who direct units such as student health, student activities, counseling services, etc.) or others within their student affairs organization, such as assistant or associate vice presidents, as well as other staff. According to some of the participants the lack of authority is challenging because the "Assistant to" does not supervise their colleagues, yet must influence their behavior. Three of the participants mentioned that their title presents challenges because it does not accurately represent their role in the organization. However, none offered a suggestion for a different title that would be a better fit. A few participants also commented on the ambiguous nature of their position. As an "Assistant to" they are not considered part of the group of directors, nor they do not feel that they are at the same level as the Vice President and senior leaders within the division, yet they often are a member of the senior leadership team. Several participants also mentioned the challenges of managing the various types of information that comes to them, as well as the various tasks associated with multiple projects and duties. A few participants discussed the pace of the work which leaves little down time. One participant stated that she felt that she was doing the work of several full-time employees.

## Findings Related to Research Questions

In the remainder of this chapter I will present the research findings in two ways. I will first present the findings in the context of the four research questions identified in Chapter One. Then I will present, in a section titled "Themes and Roles," other findings that emerged from the data analysis, which seem to cut across the four research questions.

### Manifestation of Courageous Follower Dimensions

The first research question was "*Do Chaleff's five dimensions (and associated behaviors) of a Courageous Follower manifest themselves in the work of the "Assistant to" in student affairs organizations? If so, how?* The Courageous Follower model consists of the following five dimensions: the Courage to Assume Responsibility, the Courage to Serve, the Courage to Challenge, the Courage to the Participate in Transformation and the Courage to Take Moral Action.

In order to evaluate the extent to which the participants demonstrated these dimensions I asked two questions for each dimension, with appropriate follow-up questions. The initial two questions were either derived from *The Followership Profile,* an instrument developed by Dixon (2003) which measures Courageous Follower behaviors associated with each dimension using a forced-choice response scale, or were based on Chaleff's discussion of the Courageous Follower model. In Chapter Three I provided a more detailed discussion of how the questions asked were developed, but each question was chosen because they represented the core behaviors of each dimension, in my opinion. In some instances, there are multiple behaviors that were addressed in a single question. *The Followership Profile* uses multiple questions to assess each dimension. For example, 20 questions are used to assess the Courage to Assume Responsibility and 12 are used to assess the Courage to Take Moral Action.

The findings for each of the five dimensions will be presented in the order in which they appear in the model (i.e., The Courage to Assume Responsibility, The Courage to Serve, The Courage to Challenge, The Courage to Participate in Transformation, and The Courage to Take Moral Action), which coincidentally is the order in which the participants appear to demonstrate the various behaviors associated with each dimension starting from most likely to least likely. As the findings for each Courageous Follower dimension are presented below, there will be a brief description of the primary dimension (e.g., the Courage to Assume Responsibility), followed by the findings related to the primary and secondary behaviors of each dimension. With regard to the Courage to Assume Responsibility and the Courage to Serve, the secondary behavior of the dimension has multiple parts.

**The Courage to Assume Responsibility.** According to Chaleff (2009), Courageous Followers "…assume responsibility for themselves and the organization…[they] discover or create opportunities to fulfill their potential and maximize their value to the organization. They initiate values-based actions to improve the organization's external activities and its internal processes (p. 9)." In order to explore the extent to which this behavior was demonstrated by the participants they were asked two questions. The first of which was: "*In what ways have you demonstrated your ability to assume more responsibility for the organization by initiating ideas and actions on your own?"* Below are some examples of responses to this question from participants.

***Demonstrating initiative.*** With regard to the first question, 12 of the 15 participants were able to provide at least one example (and in some cases more) to demonstrate their ability to initiate ideas and actions on their own. The examples provided fell into two primary categories: those impacting core operational functions and those which impacted students. There were also a few examples that did not fall into either of those categories. For example, Jill's example involved convening a regular meeting of administrative assistants within the student affairs division to address issues which arose from time to time.

*Core student affairs operational examples.* Seven of the examples related to core operational functions for a division of student affairs, such as assessment, budgeting, communication, and professional development. In some instances the examples were not related to their official job responsibilities at the time. For example, Vanessa discussed her efforts to improve assessment. At the time she was hired for her current position she did not have a formal assessment role, although her vice president asked her to review year-end reports from all units within the student affairs division because she did not have time to do so herself. Vanessa commented:

> And so while reviewing them [year-end reports] the sort of same themes kept coming up with folks in how they were assessing and what they, what conclusions they were making. And how they were basically using assessment to inform their practice. It was across the board not going well in my opinion. It just felt like it was very surface-y...It felt like we were very much in a culture of justification and I just felt like that's not the place the VP really wanted us to be, but didn't have the time—she didn't have time to put any focus on it. So I said '*let me'*—so I reviewed for the first year I thought this is ….not quality work….So I decided to take that and say 'How can we first of all make it valuable to the division?'

Vanessa's experience also demonstrated how positions evolved over time for some participants, resulting in the "Assistant to" taking on responsibility for initiatives they have created. Vanessa also observed that as she became more comfortable with her boss and her position, she became more willing to identify problems and take responsibility for addressing them, when in turn increased her areas of responsibility:

> Much of what my position has evolved into is because I've said 'Here's a gap, let me fill it….' I learned from a leader not too long ago that if you're going to raise your hand and call something out you better be willing to own it. And I love that, so if I call something out as a deficiency you know I'm not just going to let it hang. I'm going to say 'Okay here's a gap and I'm going to take this one.' And as we've gone on I've been able to be more forward with that 'Here's a proposal, this is how I'm going to solve the problem. Before it was here's a problem, is this something you want me to solve?'

Vanessa attributed a deepening relationship between her and her boss as a contributor to her ability to be more assertive with regard to taking responsibility for addressing problems: "And so as we progress in our relationship we've been able to do that."

Michelle also provided an example related to assessment. She was charged with overseeing assessment by her vice president, but this was not her area of expertise. However, she took it upon herself to learn more about assessment so that she could perform this aspect of her new role:

> …I always felt like my first days, first few years in the office—in the position that I was constantly reading books and people would walk by my office and I had a book in front of my face and I would think they think 'Oh yeah Michelle has a great job, she just sits around and reads all day.' But knowing that for me I didn't expect to have all the answers and you know was very open that I'm not 100 percent expert in this assessment area, but I'm going to become their person and I'm going to figure this out.

Erica and Joseph both provided examples related to budget functions within their respective student affairs divisions. Erica volunteered to assume budget responsibilities when a person left their position and there were not funds to available to hire a replacement: "So I offered to step in and take that role in fill in that gap. And it ended up becoming a permanent part of my role." In addition to assuming this new responsibility, Erica also demonstrated initiative by identifying the need for a budget advisory committee within her student affairs organization. Joseph provided an example of implementing new processes related to budgeting and other core student affairs functions: "…we've put in new processes around budget, communication and technology that have helped centralize the thought and action process around it."

*Student-related examples.* Seven of the examples provided by the participants of demonstrating their ability to take more responsibility for the organization or initiate actions on their own were related to issues that directly impacted students. For example, Lisa cited her work related to Title IX:

> Title IX on campus seemed to be a political hot potato. And everyone wanted, but nobody wanted to take ownership of it and actually make it happen. So in my role I took the responsibility to start creating, kind of just documenting the landscape of who was doing what to start pulling it all together and identify the gaps and figuring out who was doing work in what areas and what additional work needed to be done. And made some recommendations about who might be the best to do that work.

Lisa added that she does this type of work fairly frequently and stated that performing gap analysis and making recommendations for closing identified gaps is a primary part of her position.

Jennifer provided an example on a similar topic when she discussed her role in enhancing sexual violence education efforts on her campus by identifying a gap in existing programming:

> …something that I try to do all the time is bring up ideas. So for instance I mentioned the sexual assault education. I noticed that there was a gap on our campus that we didn't have anything that was like formalized education and that there were lots of people doing little things, but that we didn't have anyone devoted to that.

Much like Vanessa in the section above, Jennifer went beyond merely raising an issue, but played an active role in addressing it as well:

> And so I brought it to my supervisor's attention. I'm also in the process of working with some folks on our campus to apply for grant funding for sexual assault education…I just took the initiative, did the research, wrote the position, gave it to him [her SSAO] and went from there.

Tanya provided several examples of initiating changes in how her institution responded to students in need, including creating a program to help faculty and staff better support students who exhibited concerning behaviors:

> …for example I started planting the seed with the counseling center, 'This is something I'd really like to do—I think it could be great to get out there and share our message to help faculty know what to do when they have a concerning student.' So that's something that came out of my idea.

Angela also provided an example of helping others to help students in need of assistance:

> …so there was a need that was identified for more staff members to be trained on being able to reach out to students in an advocacy role. And so I began to work with staff members [in other parts of Student Affairs] that expressed an interest in working with students in addition to their job that they did on a regular basis.

The second question asked to assess the Courage to Assume Responsibility was *"In what ways have you demonstrated the ability to do any of the following: engage in self-assessment and personal growth, influence the culture of your organization, improve processes?"* According to Chaleff (2009), these are some of the ways that a follower can demonstrate that they are able to take on more responsibility and improve their organization. Below are some examples of participant responses to this question. They will be presented in the following order: Influencing the Culture, Self-Assessment and Personal Growth, and Improving Processes based on the relative frequency of each behavior explored.

***Influencing the culture***. Nine of the 15 participants were able to provide an example of how they had influenced the culture of their organization. The examples ranged from those that may have been intentional efforts to move the organization's culture in a certain direction to those that seem to be a by-product of how individuals do their work. Because the examples were all self-reported it is not possible to determine whether the culture was impacted in a meaningful way. The examples that will be shared below are presented in three categories, although the categories are not mutually exclusive:  examples related to a person's formal job responsibilities, examples that are not related to a person's formal job responsibilities, and examples demonstrating the "Assistant to's" impact on others, which may in turn impact the culture.

*Job responsibilities-related examples.* Several participants offered examples that were related to their job responsibilities. In one such instance the example related to the core student affairs function of assessment. Denise indicated that prior to her assessment work within her student affairs division assessment was not viewed favorably within the division:

> I think with the culture of the organization the focus on assessment is probably the best example of that. People have told me that before I started doing the work that I do that people had a very negative attitude toward assessment. You know I don't know that I can completely take credit for that change, but it is gratifying that people have come around to realizing that there is an intrinsic value in what they're doing related to assessment.

A core part of Monique's position is serving as a liaison to students and families and her example of influencing the culture related to making her student affairs division more student-centered: "... I would say culture-wise in the Division of Student Affairs I think that I have most certainly added to the focus of that the students are our work and that I've been able to model that for our office really well."

*Non-job responsibilities-related examples.* Others provided examples of influencing culture that were not related to their formal job duties. Jennifer, for example, indicated that she impacted how her student affairs division provided professional development for staff in her role as co-chair of the Staff Development Committee:

> …part of the work that I've been doing with them is …making sure that we're …doing development activities for our staff because we do it for our students. But just because you're out of school doesn't mean that you're done developing and making sure we're still helping with developing professional competencies in our staff members.

Tanya provided an example of how she influenced how her division integrated issues of social justice and diversity into its operations:

> I was talking a lot about social justice and diversity and they just wanted to focus on diversity. And so what was interesting is now we're at a point where we are rewriting our themes to actually include social justice and diversity and really thinking about the competencies and you know what we can all do. And they were doing that before, but in a different way.

Although it was not part of her position, according to Tanya, her commitment to social justice played a factor in her hiring: "So one of the reasons why my VP hired me, and she told me this, what that…I came from an institution that was really committed to social justice and diversity." Tanya's willingness to try to change the focus of discussions related to diversity, is also an example of demonstrating the Courage to Assume Responsibility.

*Impacting others examples.* Several participants provided examples of influencing the culture of their organization that demonstrated their impact on those they work with, which in turn may have an impact on the organization's culture. For example, Megan discussed her friendly nature, efforts to build collaborative relationships and how she encouraged others to do the same:

> …I'm a friendly person and I feel like that's something that we need in our organizational culture to be successful. Because when you're—… friendly is not the best word, but collaborative, to build to have collaborative relationships. And so I feel like that is my style. And so I feel like I am influencing that all the time. Encouraging people to breakout to other areas or other areas across campus or other areas within our division.

Maria used her efforts to be a role model as an example of how she impacts the culture of her organization: "So I'm the co-chair of our women and student affairs group to empower women leaders in the division and we try to serve as a role model to them to encourage them to develop professionally."

Michelle discussed how she has influenced the culture of her organization by the way that she participates in meetings. She asserts that she is able to make contributions, despite her relative youth, which shows that younger staff can contribute to the organization:

> …So from the very beginning I've always recognized I was extremely lucky in a sense that I always say I was at the big boy/big girl table from really my first or as soon as our new VP got here…And so I am at the table with our Dean of Students, our directors of housing, career center, all the people who may and many of which have PhD's or have been in the field for 15, 20 years. And I had just as much a seat at that table as they did. And so I think influencing the culture of I think bringing a different perspective to those meetings and finding a place. I think influence our culture in terms of--there are a lot of incredibly young and mid-professionals who have a lot to bring to the table, but oftentimes aren't included.

***Self-assessment and personal growth.*** With regard to demonstrating the ability to engage in self-assessment and personal growth, eight participants were able to provide examples of engaging in self-assessment and/or being open to feedback and the same number were able to provide examples of engaging in personal growth. Below I will provide examples from participants demonstrating their ability to engage in self-assessment, as well as examples of those who engaged in personal growth. In some of the examples below, the SSAO played a role in facilitating the participant's self-assessment in the context of performance evaluations.

Chaleff (2009) places a lot of importance of ability of a follower to assume responsibility for themselves, as part of the Courage to Assume Responsibility. He writes "Before we can assume responsibility for the organization, we must assume responsibility for ourselves….I had to assume responsibility for my own growth. We cannot remain static ourselves and expect to improve the organization" ( pp. 37-38). Because of its importance as a foundation for a follower to demonstrate the ability to take responsibility or initiative as part of the Courage to Assume Responsibility I have allocated a significant amount of space to sharing the findings related to this part of the Courageous Follower model.

*Self-assessment.* Denise, Erica, and Maria all provided examples of engaging in self-assessment. For example, Denise engages in self-reflection weekly and it's a key part of how she approaches her work:

> …I'm a really big self-reflector…I try to set aside time at the end of every week. Every Friday afternoon I have my week-in-preview/review where I look at what I had hoped—what I said I wanted to accomplish for the coming week and then what I actually did and how, to what extent that I actually meet the goals that I had set for myself in terms of getting things accomplished.

Erica reflects on her actions and actively seeks out feedback from others, especially when she believes that she could have handled a situation better:

> …I'm always looking at ways of how can I, if I feel uncomfortable about something that I feel like I don't know if I did that very well, I will always tap someone and say 'What do you think about this? Do you think there's something that I could have done better or different.'

Maria provided an example of how she intentionally sought feedback from others by volunteering to participate in 360 degree reviews, although she was not required to do so:

> …So a year and half ago we hired four employees to start working for me…And so this fall after being in place pretty much everyone for a year, I asked the Vice President to do a 360 evaluation on me…That was not something that I was required to do. I wanted to give my team a chance to evaluate me and give me an opportunity you know to so that I can know 'Okay what am I doing well? What am I not doing well? What do you think I need to work on?'

A few participants provided examples demonstrating their participation in self-assessment, but also provided examples of areas where they wanted to make improvements based on self-reflection or feedback from others. For example, Jennifer noted that she wanted to work more with students after participating in her annual review, and indicated that she added areas of focus that were not identified by her vice president:

> …we have obviously an annual review. And during that review…my supervisor and I spoke about what areas of growth were needed and kind of some things to do to challenge myself. And I had more stuff to add than what he had, so I'm always self-assessing…I wanted definitely to get more contact with students.

For Jennifer her desire to grow was connected with her desire to advance professionally:

> Because I'm not going to be an assistant forever and I mentioned I have a Master's degree in Higher Ed and I wanted, I want to move up and move on and, once I'm ready to leave this position I want to make sure I have experiences that I could get an assistant director job or whatever's the next step.

Some participants provided examples of how their ability to reflect impacted how they work with others. For example, Angela is trying to work on the way she interacts with others after receiving feedback that she can be perceived as aggressive and is trying to change that perception proactively, in part by reading books to help with her desired changes. Her efforts have helped her try to find areas of common ground and work with others and focus more on how to benefit the students of her institution. One participant discussed their transition from one position within their student affairs organization to their current position and how they realized that they needed to gain respect within the organization in their new role, despite the level of respect that they had previously among others in their organization:

> …It was important for me to understand how the organization saw me as a leader. And I think they saw me as a leader in areas around technology because that's been my …reputation as a professional in student affairs. So I think that anything around technology they were on board no matter what relationship I had with them because they knew I was a content expert in that. However, when I had to sell them on processes around communication and budgeting they weren't as quick to jump on board because they hadn't seen proven practices and results around those two areas…Respect isn't earned globally, you have to earn it in every single facet of your job responsibilities in order to make real change happen.

*Personal growth.* As mentioned above, eight participants also provided examples that demonstrated their ability to engage in personal growth. These included those who sought to increase their knowledge base, through attending a conference or training, and reading, and one participant who provided an example of taking on a new challenge: writing a book chapter. The examples that follow below are all from participants who sought personal growth by expanding their knowledge.

For example, Megan has attended a women's leadership conference. Mary participated in various leadership trainings and certification opportunities which she selects opportunities based on what might expand her knowledge base, as well as what might enable her to help her division:

> I'm regularly invited to take part in different leadership trainings or certifications…I pick and choose what I feel is appropriate for me to participate in. And so that was one [a training regarding StrengthsFinder] that I felt was worthwhile and would benefit the division for me and in terms of my relationship building with faculty and other administrators…

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Lisa sought out training on Title IX as she realized that this was an emerging issue within higher education:

> I try to be proactive in looking at kind of broader areas where I need to gain additional knowledge. Title IX is one of those areas. It's not my direct responsibility, but I need to, need to know about the laws and I need to know about best practice.

Vanessa discussed her efforts to read many books and articles so that she can stay informed about student and higher education trends. For some participants, seeking out knowledge and keeping current was viewed as a necessary aspect of the job. This is particularly important given the demands of being in a role that is very much a generalist within student affairs organizations at a public institution, as Kerry pointed out:

> I scan a lot of the daily periodicals focusing on higher education. …because I'm at a public university I try to follow the state politics that impact us, the local and regional politics. And I see it as part of my job…I go to conferences. I do these things. I guess I never thought of it, as a specific task that I do to be better at my job. I just do it…I mean you want to be *knowledgeable*. You definitely want to be seen as a generalist in many areas. And so that requires a lot of knowing what's going on as a broader, higher education community within the state.

***Improving processes***. The final behavior of the Courage to Assume Responsibility that was explored was demonstrating the ability to improve processes within the organization. Eight of those interviewed were able to provide specific examples. Participants such as Erica, Jennifer and Joseph all provided examples of improving processes that would be considered operational in nature, which impacted central office functions, as opposed to those who are served by their organizations. Participants such as Erica, Tanya, and Monique provided examples of improving processes that directly impacted students.

*Core operational/central office examples.* With regard to examples which impacted core operational or central office functions, Erica provided multiple examples, including those related to improving office operations, and budget processes. For example, she implemented a change in the office's filing process shortly after she began her position as an "Assistant to": "So when we moved over…I revamped their filling process, which doesn't seem like a lot, but when I got here they were using a typewriter…We went from typewriter mode-into the digital mode." Erica also helped to improve the division's budgeting process, which was done within the context of a budget advisory committee that she helped to create:

> …We're actually in the process of redoing how we budget and how we allocate the executive budget out into the departments. And that's something that I'm working on allocation models and how we're going to do….I don't know if we have ever done this before, but it doesn't sound like we have…I'm going, our committee's going to say 'Okay this is where we think you are this is where—what we think you will need for the next year so please tell us if we miss something and if you'—if they want more they are going to need to have a really good proposal for that.

Jennifer highlighted her efforts to create a system that tracked mail that came into the vice president's office to make it more functional and user friendly: "I hate inefficient processes so I always like to look at things and say 'How can we make this a little more efficient?'" She prefaced her example by noting that her age makes her more comfortable with using technology than some of her peers: "Again I'm younger so I'm a millennial and I see using technology is not scary"

On occasion a participant shared an example related to behaviors within one of the five Courageous Follower dimensions, but not in response to a question related to that behavior. Such was the case with Joseph who provided the following example of improving processes while responding to a question about how he helped contribute to the success of his student affairs organization:

> … So as an example, instead of having smaller departments with… two to three people have to not only manage their program planning and service delivery to students…Now we can deliver marketing and communication for them because I've centralized our marketing and communication efforts geared at students…Centralizing the process for marketing and communication I think has freed up more time for them to do what they want to do.

*Student-related examples.* Some examples that were provided directly impacted students at the institution, rather than operations. For example, Tanya provided several examples, including her effort to transform how the division handled students with concerning behaviors:

> So improve processes…. a huge one is how we run the Student Concerns meeting. Because I track all of the data, I have all of the data in a computer database. And so I really help to run that meeting in an efficient way and give updates in an efficient way.

Erica provided an example of creating a database that kept track of existing student conduct cases as the institution transitioned to a new system of tracking such cases: "But before we could get that I created an access database that, so it was kind of [software product]-retro in a way. But I created that Access database filing and then we moved into [software product]." Monique provided an example related to the institution's process for students who withdrew from school:

> ...I would say improve processes is definitely one that I can speak to. We have, again, the institution you know I think sometimes we're very relationship-oriented, people-oriented but sometimes our process in, um, aren't in line with that. And so I had an opportunity to work with, engage in a work group to help lay out steps or processes for withdrawal for students who are looking to withdraw from the institution or have a break in enrollment. And putting that in a way, in one area, because it was kind of like piecemeal in different areas.

**The Courage to Serve**. The second Courageous Follower dimension is the Courage to Serve. According to Chaleff (2009) a person who is a Courageous Follower will "…assume new or additional responsibilities to unburden the leader and serve the organization…Courageous followers stand up for their leader and the tough decisions a leader must make if the organization is to achieve its purpose" (p. 7). Two questions were posed to participants in order to explore the Courage to Serve. The first question was "*In ways have you demonstrated that you can concern when you can speak or act for your SSAO and when you need to consult with them first?*" This is the core behavior of the Courage to Serve that was explored.

The second question asked of participants with regard to the Courage to Serve was "*In what ways have you demonstrated the ability to do any of the following: improve communication processes, serve as a gatekeeper, defend your SSAO, manage conflicts between your SSAO and other leaders?"* These are several of the behaviors that Chaleff associates with the Courage to Serve. The findings related to the first question will be presented below in the section titled "Speaking or Acting on Behalf of the SSAO." The findings related to the second question will be presented in the sections titled "Serving As a Gatekeeper", "Defending the SSAO", "Improving Communications Processes" and "Managing Conflicts." The order reflects the relative frequency of expression of the relevant behaviors by the participants.

***Speaking or acting on behalf of the SSAO.*** In his discussion of the Courage to Serve, Chaleff highlights a variety of ways that a follower can "serve" their leader, many of which result in reducing burdens that are often associated with their leader's position. One way of reducing those burdens is being able to determine when you must consult with your leader regarding a decision or an action, or when you can act or speak without consulting. Twelve participants indicated that they were able to make such a determination, and eight of these were able provide specifics about how they determine when it is appropriate to consult with their boss and when it is not. Several participants mentioned the role that urgency and time plays in deciding whether they need to consult with their vice president before acting or speaking on their behalf. For example, Megan noted urgency is a factor, and she also mentioned the role that trust plays in this aspect of her work:

> I think it depends on the urgency of the situation. If it's a student emergency and he's not available then I definitely feel empowered to act on his behalf, speak on his behalf. And he trusts me to do that. If I know that there are things that he's sensitive about, hot topics across the University that may be…If I'm not confident in how he's going to react to something that I say on his behalf then I don't. I don't do that. …But I feel like I know him well enough to know and I know what our sensitive areas are on campus….

Denise indicated that while it is rare for her to take actions without consulting with her SSAO, she will do it when it involves a student emergency:

> So I'm thinking if a student comes in and is asking for financial assistance for something because there is some kind of personal emergency that's come up. I've been here long enough to know that the vice president is always happy to help students where we able to in those situations.

Angela indicated that due to the nature of her role, decisions need to be made in a timely manner and that as a result she has to act. "Other times…a lot of what we do is reacting in real time. And a decision is—it has to be made. And I think that I'm comfortable moving forward with that and then informing my vice president, or course always keeping him in the loop." Angela also provided an example of a time when she consulted with her vice president in a time-sensitive situation and they co-constructed a response, indicating that she can discern when she can act on her own and when to consult:

> I had been speaking with our director of health services and I thought 'Okay let me call you back in just a few minutes, I just need to review this for a minute.' And then my next phone call was to our vice president and I said 'Hey this is happening in the moment, what are your thoughts?' And then on the phone we were able to kind of coordinate a response together. But I felt like this is something that I probably needed to review with my VP first before just making a decision.

For some participants, the specifics of the issue impacts whether they believe they can make a decision or take action, or if they need to consult with their boss first. For example, Jill, whose primary responsibility is managing her vice president's schedule, will consult with him on scheduling issues that impact his personal life:

> …it depends on the situation. I would say regarding travel and his schedule for that I do need to consult with him on that because it affects his personal life too….If there are meetings or things that might interfere with the earlier hours or later hours I consult with him on that.

Mary indicated that she takes into account whether this issue involved is important to her boss:

> I know what the critical issues or areas are for her. For example, one area where I would not make any decisions is that she's co-chair [of a task force appointed by the institution's president]. And so if anything was going on with that I would, I would not make a decision without consulting her and how she wanted to proceed.

Tanya indicated that she will consult with her boss first if the issue involves significant changes in how the division does its work:

> So anytime there's big changes of any sort of things or programs out of our division obviously I would need to consul...For example, today I brought up [at a meeting of the Vice President's Council] several things about a new student orientation which we're going to launch, our new staff member orientation which we're going to launch next year.

Denise and Lisa were explicit about not speaking for their boss without consulting with them first. For example, Denise said:

> I don't ever really speak for the vice president without consulting with her first. I mean I want to be clear about what she wants. I will communicate the message that she wants me to communicate, but I would not go into a meeting purporting to represent the vice president without the vice president being very clear about what I was there for.

Lisa stated:

> I would never—I have fairly good access to the vice president. So we talk a lot. There's always a list and it's important that I have a sense of where his head is around particular issues…If I don't have a good sense of what his orientation is I wouldn't, I wouldn't speak on his behalf without knowing that.

As noted earlier the second question posed to the participants related to the Courage to Serve was intended to explore a number of other behaviors associated with this dimension. Findings related to the second question will be presented below in the following order "Serving As a Gatekeeper", "Defending the SSAO", "Improving Communications Processes" and "Managing Conflicts", which approximates the relative frequency of expression of the various behaviors.

***Serving as a gatekeeper.*** Eleven of the participants indicated that they played a gatekeeping role vis a via their SSAO. For three participants (i.e., Erica, Jennifer, and Jill), this role was a part of their primary job responsibilities due to their management of their vice president's schedule. For the remainder of the participants it was not an official role, but something they did with the intent of "keeping things off of the vice president's plate", which was a phrase that several used when describing their role as a gatekeeper. Participants frequently characterized their actions as triaging situations involving students, parents, division staff, etc. Two provided examples which indicated that their gatekeeping was directed by their vice president and a few noted that their physical proximity to the vice president and/or support staff in the central student affairs office facilitated this role.

*Schedule-related examples.* Jill and Jennifer discussed their role as gatekeepers and indicated that they play this role literally in some instances, in part due to their proximity to the SSAO's office. For example, Jill, whose primary responsibilities include scheduling meetings for the vice president, highlighted the role that physical proximity plays in her experiences as a gatekeeper:

> The gatekeeper role I've done strongly in both roles [referring to working for multiple SSAOs]. I especially do it more in this role because his office is in close proximity to the door coming into our office. So I have to stop people from going inside his office and ask them if they don't have an appointment….

She indicated that the vice president has reinforced her gatekeeping role, which encouraged her efforts. "And he has also communicated to me the importance of that role. So I take that very seriously."

Jennifer also has scheduling and calendar management as a core part of her job responsibilities. She also noted her role in preventing people from meeting with the vice president who do not have an appointment, which also provided an example of influencing the culture within her organization:

> And so a lot of people, there's just kind of this culture where people just think that they can meet with him [the vice president] whenever because they're whoever, that they can just stop by, and so I have definitely put the kibosh on that. And random people just walking into the office definitely no longer happens.

Mary does not have scheduling as her primary role, but I will share her example here because it is similar to Jill and Jennifer's with regard to the role that proximity plays in serving as a gatekeeper:

> Definitely more in the past few months as I've kind of moved physically to be near her [the vice president]. An example of that would be, and I'm, my cubicle is right near her exec admin assistant, right? So last week I heard her saying 'She's really not available no, no, I'm sorry, yes I know, no'—you know someone was giving her a really hard time. So I said 'Send that person to me, send that person to me'…I was able to hear them, figure out what steps were needed, what they needed to hear next, what follow up I needed to do. And it certainly wasn't something she needed to deal with.

Lisa does not have scheduling meetings for her vice president as a job responsibility, but does review meetings on their schedule. She suggests changes based on her sense of what's the best use of the vice president's time. In discussing her gatekeeping role she said,

> But you know really helping to figure out which of the meetings that are scheduled or being requested to be scheduled are most relevant and most critical for his time. And make a recommendation about whether or not this could be effectively managed by someone else on the team. So when I say gatekeeping it's really more about…time management.

*Examples of taking things off of the SSAO's plate.* For seven of those who indicated that they played a gatekeeper role their examples focused less on the SSAO's schedule, but either meeting with people to respond to their concerns so that the SSAO did not have to, or finding other people to meet with the SSAO. For example, Tanya reflected on her gatekeeping role when she has dealt with student and parent issues as ensuring that the vice president's office can resolve an issue without the vice president having to become involved: "…when I think about navigating as a gatekeeper you know I do that all the time…when I'm working with parents and students you know I want the solutions to come from our office without the VP having to get involved." Tanya notes the fact that the vice president is very busy as a rationale for her efforts. "Because she's busy. She's got a lot going on."

Angela, like Tanya, tries to maximize the use of her SSAO's time by offering to meet students and others who wish to meet with her vice president. She noted that she is not always successful, but tries to help those who wish to meet with the vice president see that she can assist them instead:

> Gatekeeping, I think that one comes up probably most often. Particularly when individuals, mostly students, come to the Office of the Vice President and they insist on talking to the vice president. They want to talk to the highest level person that's available. They don't want to talk to anybody else.

She noted that support staff will often offer the opportunity to meet with her instead of meeting with the vice president:

> …oftentimes individuals are ok with that and there are times when they're not okay with that. And they don't want to, in their opinion, "waste their time" talking to me if it's not the individual who can help resolve their concern. Sometimes I can encourage the person to talk to me if I explain to them a little bit about what I do and how I support students, ways that I might be able to assist.

Angela sees her role as a gatekeeper as helping to keep the vice president from having to address issues that can be addressed at lower levels. She characterizes her work in this regard as serving as a firewall or barrier.

> …there's probably a lot of things that the Assistant to the Vice President does and they act as that barrier or firewall to—for things that don't need to go up to the vice president level. And so that's like the day-to-day operations of the office, issues that can be resolved on a very low level that don't need to come up to the vice president or the vice president doesn't need to be burdened with making a decision on you know very small things…They don't need to be involved in that day-to-day decision making and so I think that's where the Assistant to the Vice President is a very critical member to the student affairs staff in providing that type of support.

Two of the "Assistant to's" interviewed indicated that their vice president specifically requested that they meet with particular people so that they would not have to, unlike the examples noted above. In such instances, the "Assistant to" is providing the benefit of being a gatekeeper, but not having to decide when to play that role. For example Michelle discussed how her SSAO requests that she meet with vendors from time to time on his behalf: “In the past few years I would say that vendors have become extremely aggressive. And so oftentimes my boss has made me sort of the gatekeeper in funneling and filtering those requests.” In her opinion her SSAO makes these requests, partly based on his confidence in her ability to determine if a product is needed: “But I think that he just recognizes that I can make a, I can kind of listen to their spiel and make an educated decision of whether this is something we’re going to consider at all or not.” She also attributes her being asked to play this role to her SSAO’s difficulty in saying “no”: “But he is very easily swayed by vendors because you know I think oftentimes we’re always looking for that magic bullet, and to see the magic bullet…You know but he also is not great at saying no to people.”

***Defending the SSAO.*** Compared to other questions asked, the various participants had a lot to say in response to being asked to provide examples of how they have defended their SSAO. There was a mixture of responses from participants regarding the extent to which they have defended their leader to others within their organization. Seven participants readily indicated that they defended their vice president to others and had examples of the context in which it happened. There were six participants who did not resonate with the idea of “defending” and were more nuanced in how they characterized their response to this behavior of the Courage to Serve. They preferred other terms such as “explaining,” “providing context,” or “supporting.” For some participants, they had examples of defending, but as they responded to the question, their nuanced view of “defending” emerged. Three of these participants, Megan, Kerry, and Tanya, were represented in both categories.

Joseph, Jill and Michelle were among the participants who readily offered examples of having to defend their vice president. For example, Joseph said: “Oh I’ve had to defend my VP in most meetings I’m in when he’s not there. People are asking ‘Well why did he do that?’ or ‘Why was that decision made?’” Michelle indicated that she defended her vice president on a regular basis:

> I would say that this is one that I deal with on a regular basis in terms of like I already mentioned that…he has a different way of doing things and probably very different strengths skill set than some of our other senior leadership. And so oftentimes I may get the question of you know ‘What’s up with this? Why your boss thinking this?’ or ‘Why is your VP doing this?’

Jill indicated that she often has to defend the vice president to her colleagues, who are administrative assistants in other part of the student affairs division: “I feel like I particularly do that when our administrative assistants all meet together.” She indicated that the complaints are not typically about her vice president specifically, but about his decisions: “…a lot of times they have complaints. Not about him specifically, but about the division and the decisions that were made.” When these complaints arise she will typically defend why the decision was made, if she knows: “So I don’t ever relay anything confidential to them, but I do defend generally why the decision was made if I know why the VP might have been involved in that or not.”

*Nuanced view of defending.* Megan and Kerry readily provided examples of having to defend their vice president to their colleagues, but their examples demonstrated the nuanced way that “defending” manifests itself. Megan prefaced her example of defending by referring to her role as more “explaining” than defending: “Well I think defending and I just sometimes think it’s not as much defending as explaining the rationale and maybe people hadn’t thought of it that way.” She added that when situations arise where there are various feelings about a decision she sees her role as helping to "smooth" tensions that may exist following decisions that are made by the vice president. She provided an example of one such time, after her vice president made a decision to restructure part of the student affairs organization:

> So we restructured recently and moved one area our [one department]…into [another department]. And people were confused by that. But one of the things that I tried to do after my colleagues had all heard the news and were reacting to that is just to talk to them about how we're moving to a different model and want everyone under one [combined department], it makes sense to have them under one umbrella, one supervisor.

Kerry readily indicated that she is "always defending the decisions" that are made by her vice president and/or within her student affairs organization, noting that "it's just part of the job." She added:

> Gosh I mean internally and externally you're defending decisions, things that are made, why budget cuts were made, why we moved in this direction and not that direction, why we can't meet a deadline, why we can't provide someone with the staffing that they need.

Kerry sees her role in defending as one that demonstrates that she is good at her job because she is "another path of communication" for her vice president. While she sees defending as a normal and positive part of her role, she also characterized what she did as providing context and explaining so that others can understand a decision better:

> And sometimes I can be more descriptive or provide more context or background and help people work through why the decisions were made, whether that's students, whether that's staff…..So I'm always defending—not necessarily like in a negative context, but explaining why it is that we do the things that we do to people who may have questions about why it is we do the things that we do.

In discussing the extent to which she defends her SSAO, Angela characterized what she does as "supporting" rather than defending her efforts to build support for the SSAO's initiatives and decisions: "And I don't necessarily know if that's necessarily defending the vice president in that moment. I see it more as supporting." She went on to also suggest that the word "reinforce" might be a more apt description of what she does, rather than "defend."

Tanya provided an example of "defending" her vice president that she characterized as putting the opinions of her vice president "into context for them." Several staff commented that they felt that the vice president was not engaged sufficiently with the staff and did not appreciate the work that they did and she challenged their assertions:

> And the staff members were talking about how they don't feel appreciated….like they didn't feel always recognized...I saw this as an opportunity to really let people know because it was almost as if they felt like the VP doesn't really know what they're doing—and that's just not true. Because she really does know what they're doing. And so I said 'I've worked in institutions, I've been at [multiple] places, and I worked in institutions where I never got to know the VP for Student Affairs...she's a very visible and engaged leader'….and some of the staff don't have anything to compare it to because they just got out of grad school….

Two participants, Vanessa and Monique, both indicated that they did not like defending their vice president, but for different reasons. For Vanessa she was worried about how others would view her if she defended her boss and Monique did not think it was a good use of her time. Monique also felt that her boss was capable of defending herself.

Vanessa provided an example of defending her vice president, but she prefaced it by stating that it is not something she likes to do because she does not want to seem like a "puppet." During an earlier part of our interview, while discussing her experience as an "Assistant to" she stated:

> I'm sort of Switzerland. I mean people know that I work for the VP and I think that they use that to their advantage when they need it…But they also understand that I don't—I personally don't have an agenda….it allows me the freedom to talk

> honestly with people or for people to talk honestly with me about problems their experiencing.

When discussing to what extent she defends her vice president she indicated that actively defending him would impact how others view her. In the example Vanessa shared, she provided context about her boss's commitment to an issue regarding a diversity matter, as well as context regarding the process it would take to create a new program. However, she made it clear during the interview that she was not defending her boss personally, but defending the administration and the administrative process:

> You know the budget committee doesn't meet until January so any new proposals--- you know I mean sort of being able to defend that process is helpful for folks who are not in the know. And that would be an opportunity for me to defend without, it's not a personal defense, it's an administrative defense.

Monique initially stated that she does not defend her vice president because she does not think it's a good use of her time. If there is someone who is upset about a decision that her vice president has made, she will simply suggest that they speak to her directly. She later explained her rationale for this by stating that she believes her boss is very capable of speaking for herself and explaining her rationale for her decisions. Additionally, she noted that her boss's leadership and decision-making style reduces the need to defend her decisions. "…the VP's very hands-on so she is, if it's a decision that's being made, typically, she's really thoughtful about including the folks in the room who are impacted by that decision."

It is worth noting that in the context of defending one's SSAO, some "Assistant to's" obtain information about staff concerns that they may share with their boss. The practice of sharing information with the vice president about concerns or perceptions of others was mentioned several times during the course of the various interviews, not just when discussing defending the vice president. When the emerging themes are presented later in this chapter, this issue will be discussed in more detail.

Lisa provided an example of this circumstance when she discusses how she strategizes about sharing the perception of others with her boss:

> So I need to find a way, in a respectful way, to convey that perception to him. And because we have a good relationship, it's you know, I'm not trying to tell him how to do his job, but I might put it in context.

Lisa noted that her relationship with her vice president facilitated her ability to talk to him about how others perceive him. Her comment highlights the role of the relationship between the "Assistant to" and the SSAO in enabling them to be a Courageous Follower. This is another theme that will be discussed at more length later in this chapter.

***Improving communication processes.*** Eight participants had examples of how they improved communication processes within their organization in response to the specific question posed. Six of the participants had communications as a primary job responsibility, as noted earlier in this chapter, and four of them provided examples of improving communication processes. Examples of improved communications processes included those focused on internal communication within a division of student affairs, as well as those focused on external audiences, including students.

*Internal communication.* Mary has communications as a primary function of her position and she provided several examples of improving various types of communications processes within her division of student affairs: "…improve communications. So that is one area that I'm overseeing. Internally with our own division and staff I've taken on a project which will be finished in a couple of months, which is the goal is to create better internal communication within the division."

Joseph, who has managing communications as one of his primary job responsibilities, provided several examples of improving communications processes, including enhancing how information is provided to directors:

> And I think the central office has done a better job of communicating to directors around decision-making and around updates that are important for the work that they do. So I feel like I've had a role in that because of the fact that we haven't had that in the past…. So it's been clear that my, I've told folks that we need to regularly communicate with directors so they have the information they need to do their job to the best of their abilities.

Maria provided several examples of improving communications processes, including some related to internal communication. Managing communications is a primary responsibility for her position. She has enhanced communication efforts within her division by creating a marketing team, creating a division newsletter, and sending periodic emails to students from the vice president:

> …when we hired the marketing [staff person], when we hired the staff in place this one of his roles...he wanted to make sure we were communicating well within the division and externally. So one of the things we put in place was we created a division newsletter probably about a year and a half ago when we had the staff in place. And we do a monthly newsletter now to all the division staff to make sure everyone knows what's going on.

Unlike other participants who provided examples of improving internal communications processes, Jill provided an example that was focused on communications between two individuals: her and her SSAO. A miscommunication between the two of them caused him to be double-booked for presentations at a national conference. Jill discussed this issue with her vice president in order to ensure that she had the information needed to adequately maintain his schedule.

> ...I approached him then and asked him, I said, 'I did not get this information and I feel very badly that I don't have this on your calendar, but I did not receive the information and I need that information from you.' So I explained that to him.

The result was a change in how they communicated about his commitments during their regular meetings.

*External communication.* While most of the examples shared by participants related to improving internal communication, four participants provided examples related to improving external communication, mostly involving students as the audience. For example, Mary shared an example of her oversight of an effort to improve various websites within her student affairs division, including those intended to reach faculty and students: “And then within communication then there are other aspects of it too where we’re working on the website, you know the main website, all the websites that fall underneath it, external communication directed at faculty, communication directed to students.”

Maria, who provided examples of improving internal communication, also provided an example of improving communication with students: “I develop communications from him [the vice president] to students. We try to send out several emails to students each semester.” Tanya discussed several improvements that she has made with regard to communicating with students:

> Our bereavement procedure you know we’ve got a system where we follow up, but then all the VP will send a letter to the student expressing condolences, so re-writing that letter. You know I send a lot of letters to students of concern. So I’ve developed templates for that.

***Managing conflicts between the SSAO and other leaders.*** The final behavior of the Courage to Serve that was examined was the ability to manage conflicts between a leader and other leaders. Based on the responses from the participants this was not a common occurrence for the “Assistant to’s” in this study. None of those interviewed indicated that they were involved in managing conflicts between their SSAO and other leaders. I should note that the question asked did not define what was meant by “leaders.” Some participants interpreted “other leaders” as referring to peers of the SSAO (i.e., other senior leaders at the institution), and some interpreted it to mean other leaders within the student affairs division, including members of the leadership team and/or unit directors. Five indicated they play an indirect role in situations where there are conflicts between their SSAO and other leaders. For some this means listening to their boss vent about frustrations with other leaders and serving as a sounding board. Jennifer is an example of one participant who plays this role:

> He tells me a lot of confidential things, including confidential feelings he may have for some of his colleagues…sometimes he needs to vent and rant about something and like you know he knows it’s confidential with me and I’m not going to go and spread rumors or share secrets about what he said.

She added that in addition to listening, she may try to give advice or reinforce his perceptions. “So…I give him advice or just agreeing like ‘Oh yeah so and so is always like that or so and so is always so dramatic, I agree.’” Finally, Jennifer stated that her efforts are intended to keep the conflict contained. “And helping him manage that conflict internally in our office so it doesn’t project into the campus community.”

Erica indicated that she sometimes acts as a “sounding board” and advisor when it comes to conflicts between her vice president and his directors and intentionally tries to present other ways of viewing an issue that her boss may be having with another leader:

> But as far as managing conflict between the directors and the VP and maybe even the directors and directors, I see my role as a sounding board. So I’ll let them vent, but I won’t engage. Because the VP is my boss so I’m not going to commiserate with them and say ‘Oh yeah man he’s such a jerk.’ Not that we would ever say that. But I’m going to let them vent and then I’ll come at it with ‘Well what do you think about this?’ Or ‘ Maybe there’s another way of approaching this.’

Megan and Vanessa both discussed their indirect role in managing conflict. Megan tries to avoid getting directly involved in managing conflicts, but tries to maintain positive relationships those who may be having a conflict with her vice president:

> I do have a good relationship with the other VPs and so I try not –if I know there's a conflict, I guess I don't manage it. Because I try not get involved. But I will try to, overcompensate is not a good word, but I will try if I have an interaction I definitely don't bring it up especially if it's a confidential matter, but I try to be easy going and collaborative and willing to work together to try to ease that situation.

Vanessa's example of her role in managing conflict was unique in that her vice president has used her as a surrogate for committee meetings so that she could avoid conflict with a particular person who worked outside of student affairs, which could be disruptive to committee's goals. According to Vanessa, there was a contentious issue involving her division and another part of the institution which had to grant approval for work in which her student affairs division to engage. "…so there's ways of solving that problem in a professional way, for example putting me on the…Board. So let's put someone in who has a different view, but you know an objective view. But also I have a direct line to the VP if there's some problems."

Both Erica and Kerry expressed concerns about getting involved in managing conflict. While Erica was willing to play a role in managing conflicts between her SSAO and his directors, she did not think it was appropriate for her to do so with his vice president colleagues. She felt that would be inappropriate and outside of her realm of authority, unless she was specifically asked to assist. "…I guess as far as between the VPs I don't, that's way above my pay grade. Unless he needs me to do something specifically then I'll step in and help but that's, I don't touch that. That's the big boys and…. girls."

Like Erica, Kerry indicated that it would be inappropriate for her to become involved in managing conflicts between her SSAO and others out of concern for how it might impact the extent to which she is respected by others. "But I don't try to get in between the VP and other people. That would—no, I don't think people would respect me as much if I did that."

**The Courage to Challenge**. According to Chaleff (2009), Courageous Followers "…give voice to the discomfort they feel when the behaviors or policies of the leader or group conflict with their sense of what is right. They are willing to stand up, to stand out, to risk rejection, to initiate conflict in order to examine the actions of the leader or group when appropriate (p. 7)." The core behaviors of the Courage to Challenge include the ability to challenge or question their leader, and the ability to provide feedback to them about their behavior or decisions. Two questions were posed to participants in order to determine the extent to which they demonstrated the Courage to Challenge. The first question asked was "*In what ways have you challenged or stood up to your SSAO?*" The second question asked was *"In what ways have you given feedback to your SSAO on his/her behavior?"* The findings related to each question will be shared below.

***Challenging or standing up to the SSAO.*** Eleven participants indicated that they had challenged or stood up to their vice president, but only eight were able to provide specific examples. As was the case with regard to how many participants viewed "defending" their boss, many participants did not characterize what they did as challenging their boss. A few stated that they played "Devil's Advocate" when discussing issues with their boss. Several talked about their role in providing their opinion to the SSAO or providing another prospective to help inform the SSAO's decision-making.

*Examples of challenging or standing up to the SSAO.* Examples of challenging or standing up to their SSAO included those involving personnel decisions, as well as programming or events organized by the student affairs division. For example, Erica and Lisa provided examples of challenging their boss regarding personnel decisions. Erica provided an example of challenging her vice president on the salary he was going to offer to a new hire. She pointed out how the proposed salary might present equity issues with regard to another staff member who had a doctorate, while the new staff member did not. Although she was willing to challenge her boss on this matter, she apologized for throwing "a wrench" into his decision making process. However, her boss reinforced her action by telling her "that's what you're supposed to do."

Lisa provided an example of challenging her boss on hiring someone for a senior leadership position within their student affairs organization. There were two finalists and the vice president preferred one and Lisa preferred another. She felt very strongly about one of the candidates and she shared that opinion with her boss, who disagreed with her: "I felt pretty strongly that…[Candidate 1] was, that we were better served by hiring [Candidate 1]. He strongly disagreed. And so you know I expressed my opinion, he made a different decision. Ultimately he made the right decision."

Monique and Michelle both provided examples related to events or programming within the student affairs division which were supported by the SSAO. Monique provided an example of trying to convince her boss to agree to change a long-standing event that she and others felt was not meeting its intended purpose. "… I needed to basically convince her to let go of this previous notion of this event because it no longer worked and served the purpose that was intended." Although Monique used this as an example of challenging her boss, she did not do this alone. She enlisted the support of others who were involved with this event and they met with the vice president as a group in order to convince her that the event should be handled differently:

> And so I had to kind of gather the troops and the folks who helped to put on that event and put together a meeting to sit down and say 'Look we no longer want to do this event this way and these are the reasons why we feel like it doesn't work', you know the challenges of why the event doesn't work and here are some options and solutions that we have that we would really appreciate being able to try.

Michelle provided an example of giving her boss feedback on a proposed first-year seminar that the institution was going to adopt. She had concerns regarding the proposed curriculum that was developed by another staff member who was tasked by the vice president with developing the seminar:

> We don't have a freshman seminar course and he [the vice president] appointed someone to kind of lead that effort. And I really personally don't, as a person who leads a lot of retention stuff, I don't think that the curriculum…is valuable. And so really being open to kind of challenging that with him because he oversees it all. So I came in with here's my plan and here is where I think this is not in line or that this is going to be kind of a lot of fluff.

As Michelle discussed her example of challenging her boss, she highlighted the importance of self-awareness for those in positions such as hers. Her initial response to my question was:

> Yeah. This is definitely one that I will say in the past few years I've almost gotten a little concerned that I was too comfortable with. Because I know there are other people who are in senior leadership that will be like 'Such and such just complains about everything.'

As a result of her concern about how she is perceived, Michelle tries to temper her desire to challenge with an awareness of how it will be viewed by those with whom she works.

Denise did not provide a specific example of challenging her boss, but like Michelle, her response highlighted the importance of self-awareness and the concern about how one is perceived by others. She is aware that although she tries to express her disagreement with something gently, that is not always how it is perceived:

> I know I've been in a situation where we don't necessarily agree on something and I will try to gently say you know to express that. Sometimes I'm not quite as gentle as I think I'm trying to be. I know sometimes…I can come on a bit strong.

She added that she struggles with discerning when to share a disagreement with her boss in private or in the presence of others, such as in a senior staff meeting:

> …I think that one of the things that I struggle with a little bit is figuring out when I need to do that in private as opposed to when I should be doing it at a senior staff meeting…it's healthy to have people bringing in different perspectives and putting them on the table. I always want to do that in a respectful manner and never have the vice president feel like I am undermining her in some way because I don't necessarily agree with a decision that's been made.

*Nuanced view of challenging.* Megan and Vanessa were among the participants who presented a more nuanced view of challenging their boss. For example, Megan stated that she views what she does as stating her opinion and not challenging: "I don't know that…there's been a situation that I've had to do that, challenge or stand up. I guess that's just, again, I present my opinion. So some people may see that as challenging." Vanessa responded to my question by clearly stating that she views what she does as playing Devil's Advocate. "…I don't know that I necessarily challenge, but I probably play Devil's Advocate a lot. I probably do a lot of 'What if and why' when we're having conversations about things that are…brought up." For Vanessa her approach is grounded in her educational background. She notes that her Master's degree is in counseling which has taught her about the use of reflection as a way of challenging the thinking of her boss: "I have a Master's in counseling. So I also go back to that sort of reflective thing. So it's definitely not a passive aggressive thing, it's more of a Devil's Advocate and reflective challenge than anything else."

Similarly, Mary struggled with viewing what she does as challenging. She discussed the nature of her relationship with her boss and its foundation of trust and honesty. For her what others might consider challenging, she sees as merely having a discussion: "Well I mean it's more of a discussion, it's more discussion-based and it's typically in a situation where I'm disagreeing." Mary also indicated that she typically needs to be asked to provide her input unless it's an issue that is of great concern:

> I would not offer, if she didn't specifically ask me, then I would not offer it. Because unless it's something glaringly you know I really felt really, really strongly about. Because I think part of, being successful in this role is knowing what she would want my input on and what she wouldn't.

***Offering feedback to the SSAO about their behavior.*** In addition to being willing to challenge or stand up to your leader, another important behavior of the Courage to Challenge is the ability to give your leader feedback on their behavior. Eleven participants indicated that they had done this, and nine were able to provide a specific example. Nine of the examples provided by the participants [some participants provided more than one] centered on behaviors that impacted staff negatively. Four of the examples provided were related to work-life balance issues. Some of the work-life balance examples, are examples of behavior that impacted staff negatively.

Kerry, Vanessa, Michelle, and Maria all provided examples of raising issues with their boss because their behavior was impacting staff in their division. Kerry's examples involved behaviors that might offend or bother staff:

> …some people that I know don't like to be—don't like to be joked with. Some people I know, based on their religious or spiritual practice, don't like swearing.

> Some people I know don't like a joke or a sense of humor. If the name is mispronounced or incorrect, I correct him [the vice president].

According to Kerry, she has never asked her boss if he appreciates her feedback, but she provides it because "….that's what I'm being paid to do." She attributed her ability to provide feedback to the fact that honesty is a defining aspect of their relationship: "I mean again it's just part of the honesty." The role that honesty plays in the relationship between the "Assistant to" and their SSAO will be discussed later in the Themes and Roles section.

Vanessa gave her vice president feedback about the need to make a more personal connection to staff. Vanessa noted that she regularly heard from staff on this issue and that they did not feel that they knew their vice president sufficiently: "…I have given encouragement in terms of you know it's that staff need to see her. Staff need to be connected to her. That they feel like there's a need for a personal connection because that leads to trust." In addition to encouraging her vice president to attend more events that would show staff that she cares about the work that they do, Vanessa worked with her vice president's scheduler to put specific events on her schedule:

> So we, I work with her admin assistant regularly to try to put things on her calendar like if there's a big event to make sure she knows about it and/or that she goes. And oftentimes I'll say 'Hey there's that career thing going on today, are you going? Make sure you stop by or to say hey you know what? So and so told me that it really meant a lot that you came by there.'

Michelle provided an example that involved a perceived lack of recognition for the hard work that staff had done on an important project. The vice president was focusing on one aspect of a multi-pronged initiative and Michelle was aware that his narrow focus was impacting staff morale. She spoke to her boss directly about her concerns: "And so that was one I was very direct with him on....if we only celebrate this,

this is going to make people not want to continue to do all the other work." Her efforts were successful in that the vice president sent out an email expressing his pride in their achievement which appropriately acknowledged their work.

Maria provided an example of a decision that her vice president was considering that had the potential to negatively impact staff. Due to how busy his schedule was he wanted to reduce his regular one-on-one meetings with his direct reports. She had heard from other staff about the impact of having less access to the vice president when they moved out of the vice president's office suite. She advised the vice president of her concerns: "…my challenge back to him was, well is that going to be enough especially for a staff member who maybe has only been here for a year?...You know they're still trying to get their shop in order." She added that her vice president appreciates when she provides that kind of feedback: "…I think that's one thing he appreciates is I try you know, I will bring those things to his attention as needed."

As I mentioned earlier, several participants provided examples of offering feedback related to work-life balance issues. Some examples were motivated by concerns for the vice president. For example, Jennifer indicated that she encouraged her vice president to not check his email as often as he does: …when he goes on a trip I always tell him *don't check your email, just unplug, let yourself unplug*."

One person provided an example where they were motivated by concern about the impact that the vice president's work-life balance could have on others within the organization. Mary was concerned that her boss, who was new in her role, was sending out too many emails on the weekend:

> …I know this was probably early on in my current vice president's job when she was new as the vice president she would send a lot of emails to people on the

> weekend so I said 'Go ahead and write the emails on the weekend, but put them in a draft and send them Monday because people are going to feel like if they get an email from you on the weekend that they're going to have to respond.'

She also noted that she was particularly concerned that the vice president was creating a culture that expected staff to respond to emails sent on weekends. The vice president agreed with her concerns and no longer sends emails on the weekends.

Monique's example of providing feedback to her boss regarding work-life balance seemed to be driven not by a concern that her vice president's work habits negatively impacted other staff, but by the way it impacted her as well the vice president. She said,

> I think I've also provided her feedback when there've been time when she's just you know you can clearly tell you she's overworked, it's too much or whatever. And I will say to her, one of the things that I can tell her is 'It doesn't feel good when I check my email and I have an email from you at 3:00 in the morning and it tells me you are A) checking emails at 3:00 in the morning and that makes me feel bad that I don't check emails at 3:00 in the morning because I'm not going to do that because I have other responsibilities at home.'

One of the factors that made it possible for Monique to provide feedback so readily to her boss is that they have a relationship built on a foundation of open communication. Monique discussed how she has provided feedback related to their different workstyles and what she needs from her vice president (e.g., timely responses to inquiries) in order to do her job:

> …I'm usually pretty vocal. Usually I'll—and it usually comes out like if I'm getting frustrated because…I'm coming up against a deadline and I'm waiting on something from her and/or we need to make a decision about something and I can't get her to sit down for five minutes to focus on this one thing. And so I will let her know immediately 'Look you're driving me crazy, I need to get this done'….And so she knows when I'm having those moments that it's time to kind of focus and I've kind of reached my limit.

While most of the examples provided by participants related to giving negative feedback to their SSAO, both Angela and Denise provided examples of giving their boss positive feedback. Denise praised her boss for her ability to make her family a priority, despite the demands of her position: "…generally any feedback that I've had has been positive…I have told her many times that I really admire the way that she manages to…make her family such a priority despite the very stressful and time consuming job that she has." Denise's example was grounded in her familiarity with StrengthsFinder and its focus on positive psychology, which she had referred to earlier in the interview: "…again since we are kind of a positive psychology-based organization eve when there's something that you know might be considered criticism, we don't necessarily couch it in critical terms." Angela's example involved a written apology letter from her boss to a family following a sensitive issue with their student:

> …I thought that the way that he wrote it was very well handled and so I gave him that feedback. I guess that's an example when I thought that the behavior was good. But I thought that the tone and the words were very much appropriate….I'm glad that he was able to do that and wrote it very well.

Lisa did not provide a specific example of giving feedback, but she provided some insight into the care that must be taken when she has done so. She acknowledged the unique relationship that the "Assistant to" has with their vice president and that it is important to not take advantage of that when providing feedback:

> Sometimes you have to do it carefully you know…and I think you have to do it with a degree of deference and respect…And that's the dance that you need to learn as well you might have a more intimate [relationship] but you might know somebody better and you might have access to somebody on a level that some folks don't have. You can't abuse that. And so at some point you need to be cognizant of the differential and authority…Especially if it's feedback that other folks may have reported that they find offensive.

Lisa added that in some instances if she has observed a behavior displayed by her vice president that others have mentioned to her as offensive, such as using a phone in a meeting, she will "lightly suggest" that she finds the behavior to be offensive. In doing so she seems to indicate that she personalizes the issue, perhaps to avoid having to identify other staff with similar concerns.

**The Courage to Participate in Transformation**. The Courage to Participate in Transformation is the fourth dimension in the Courageous Follower model. Chaleff (2009) asserts that this dimension comes into play when a leader engages in behavior that has the ability to place the organization's common purpose in jeopardy. According to Chaleff, "If a behavior threatens to overwhelm our larger purpose, we must find the skilled help to support a transformation effort, muster the courage to pursue it, and exert the discipline required to achieve transformation" (p. 116). It is in these situations that a Courageous Follower sees the need for a transformation and acts accordingly. A Courageous Follower will "….champion the need for change and stay with the leader and group while they mutually struggle with the difficulty of real change. They examine their own need for transformation and become full participants in the change process as appropriate" ( p.7). Participants were asked two questions in order to determine to what extent they exhibited the Courage to Participate in Transformation. The first question asked was *"In what ways have you had to help your SSAO change a behavior that might threaten the ability of the organization to meet its goals?"* The second question asked was "*In what ways have you modeled for your SSAO your ability to change?"*

***Confronting a leader about the need to change their behavior.*** The primary behavior of the Courage to Participate in Transformation explored in this study was the willingness to confront a leader about the need for a change in behavior which threatens the organization's ability to carry out its mission. Along with the ability to confront the behavior, is the willingness to assist the leader as they seek to transform the behavior of concern.

Six of the participants responded to the first question by indicating that they had an example to share. The examples provided by those participants included those involving facilitating the SSAO's ability to work more effectively with other administrators, addressing negative perceptions of the SSAO held by some staff, and responding to a leadership issue within a unit. While several individuals offered examples in response to the question asked, the behaviors may not have been true threats to the ability of the organization to continue to function, but they were serious enough for the "Assistant to" to raise the issue. Also, while the participants were willing to talk to their boss about a behavior of concern, in most instances it was not clear what actions they took beyond raising the issue to support needed transformation.

One of the participants shared an example of assisting their vice president to use the services of an executive coach. They thought it would be helpful as the vice president navigated relationships with other senior leaders within the institution. The participant provided examples of individuals that they knew who used executive coaches and how they benefitted from using them. While the participant was willing to suggest the use of executive coaching, they also understood that they could not be too involved in the process:

> I found some possible folks to act in that role and then I removed myself from that engagement. So what I did not want was for [the vice president] to feel that this was my agenda. This was somebody with whom [the vice president] needed a separate relationship and not—it wasn't two of us being coached, [the vice president] really needed that on [their] own.

In the participant's opinion using the executive coach was successful for the vice president.

Tanya provided an example related to the perception of some staff that her vice president could be "short" when dealing with other staff: "Well I think sometimes my VP can be kind of short with staff. And so I've given some feedback about that…she can be a lot of fun, but she can also be really serious." She also noted that some staff were intimidated by the vice president. Tanya felt this was an issue because staff were not communicating with the vice president, even when provided with the opportunity:

> Oh yeah I mean I've told her that. Like 'They might be intimidated'…But then what we were noticing is no one's really sharing anything at these check-in meetings. As I said 'They probably don't want to share because they're probably concerned that maybe it will reflect poorly on them or you intimidate them.'

Although Tanya provided the above example in response to my question, she indicated that she did not think that her boss's behavior was undermining their organization.

Monique provided an example of participating in a transformation that was not focused on the vice president's behavior per se, but the hesitance of other staff to talk to the vice president about the behavior of a director, which was impacting the unit's functioning. Much like with Tanya's example, she had to assist her vice president to understand how people may perceive her and how that may impact their willingness to share important information with her.

> And I had to kind of get her to understand 'You may be the sweetest person in the world, but you have the title of VP and that's intimidating, you are intimidating them and regardless of your intention that's what's happening and so we need to approach this differently, you can't just keep saying that 'my door is always open' – they're not coming.'

Monique and her vice president decided that Monique should meet with staff to encourage them to share their concerns with the vice president. She did this by reassuring them that it would be okay and that they would be safe. She noted that until she took this action, no one was willing to speak to the vice president about the concerns. Monique's actions resulted in a positive outcome for the unit where there was an issue:

> ...we're still in transition now, but I think that department's in a much better place now and they feel a stronger connection to this office because they feel like they have someone who as they went through the process protected them as best as they, I could.

One of the factors that enabled Monique to assist with this issue is that both her vice president and staff in the organization were willing to trust her and more importantly, staff were willing to confide in her. As noted previously, the issue of trust and its relevance to the work of the "Assistant to" will be discussed later in this chapter in the Themes and Role section.

***Modeling the ability to change for the SSAO.*** The secondary behavior of the Courage the Participate in Transformation explored is the ability to model the ability to change for one's leader. Fourteen of the participants indicated that they modeled the ability to change for their vice president and eleven could provide a specific example, many of which were in the context of performance evaluations. However, in some instances it is not clear to what extent the vice president was aware of the changes that they made. The examples that will be shared below are those where it is more likely than not that the vice president was aware of the effort to change.

Denise provided several examples that demonstrated her ability to model change where her vice president was aware of her efforts. The first example involves her first annual performance review. As part of the review she asked her vice president to identify specific areas for improvement, which she did. She took the suggestions to heart and assumes that the behavior has changed because her vice president has not mentioned the issue in subsequent evaluations. As part of her division's performance evaluation process, staff are asked to submit a self-evaluation. One of the goals that Denise included in her self-evaluation was making time for regular self-reflection. While her vice president does not typically ask her how she is doing on that goal, Denise makes a point to update her vice president on the issues that she is working as a result of her regular self-reflection:

> So I have as one of my self-assessment goals to make time on a regular basis for self-reflection. And so she knows that it is part of what is important to me. She doesn't usually ask about it…But in our one-on-one meetings, because I tend to be a verbal processor…I will say *you know here's what I'm working on and you know gosh this didn't' go as well as I would have liked and so I really need to work on doing X, Y and Z.*

Michelle also provided an example of modeling change where her vice president was aware of her efforts. In the course of her annual performance reviews, her vice president provided her with feedback that she used a certain word a lot when she was speaking and that he interpreted it differently than she had intended. According the Michelle, the following year during her review her vice president stated "I've never seen anybody cut that type of thing cold turkey out of their vocabulary and I haven't heard you say that once."

Jennifer provided an example of a change that was not focused on personal behavior or habits as much as on the way she approached the scheduling part of her role as an "Assistant to." There was an instance where she failed to block time on her vice president's schedule to allow him to prepare for a presentation. This created a problem and Jennifer made it clear to her boss that she was willing to figure out a new way of managing his calendar:

> I wasn't like 'This is the way I do things so you just have to figure it out.' I started printing his calendars and so when we'd meet we'd go over day by day like this is what your day looks like, okay. I just was like 'Okay I'll change the way I'm

> doing this, it's obviously not working so let's assess, figure out a new way to approach it.'

Joseph cited an example related to working on providing educational resources related to Title IX, which demonstrated his ability to change to a more inclusive decision-maker. His vice president wanted the project completed in a time frame that Joseph did not think would allow for the proper consultation across the division that was necessary, so he pushed for a later deadline: "I said there's no way we can develop cross-divisionally this content without having some time to develop it." Taking the time to consult with others on a project such as this was new for Joseph: "I mean we both are used to operating…independently enough where we can move quickly on certain things. So I've had to change my approach."

**The Courage to Take Moral Action**. The final dimension in the Courageous Follower model is the Courage to Take Moral Action. As noted in Chapter Three, this dimension was initially called the Courage to Leave in Chaleff's (2009) original model, but he changed it after Dixon (2003) empirically measured the presence of Courageous Follower behaviors. Dixon found that there were more options than leaving an organization in response to concerns about ethical or moral issues. According to Chaleff "Courageous followers know when it is time to take a stand that is different from that of the leaders…The stand may involve refusing to obey a direct order, appealing the order to the next level of authority, or tendering one's resignation" (p.7).

The primary behavior of the Courage to Take Moral Action explored in this study was the follower's willingness to tell a leader about concerns related to the possible violation of the follower's values or principles. The secondary behavior of this dimension explored is the willingness to consider resigning or reporting their leader if the leader does not address ethical concerns that have been brought to their attention, or if their actions have crossed a line. In order to determine the extent to which participants demonstrated the Courage to Take Moral Action they were asked two questions. The first question asked was "*In what ways have you advised your SSAO about concerns that your personal values and principles might be threatened or compromised*." Participants were also asked to "*Describe a situation where an action taken by your SSAO caused you to consider resigning your position or reporting the action to a higher authority."*

***Raising concerns about violations of personal ethics with the SSAO.*** Twelve of the 15 participants responded that they did not have an example that fit the first question. A few responded in a way that indicated that they would never expect to have to deal with such a situation *vis a vis* their vice president. For example, when the question was posed to Kerry she responded "No. Thank God. No." Denise responded "I think it's safe to say that it's never come up." Three individuals provided examples of personal values-based issues they raised with their vice president, but in only two instances was the issue in response to an action taken by the vice president. Those two instances will be described below.

Michelle provided an example of an issue that she discussed with her vice president after he sought her opinion on the issue. He was concerned that he made staff feel guilty for taking time off from work. She took this opportunity to share her concerns about this and let him know that it was a problem:

> I would say somewhat in the personal values in terms of the value of family, he can be somewhat of a workaholic…He said 'Do I do that to you?' And it was actually addressing 'do I make you feel guilty for taking time off?' And that was probably the first time that I've somewhat been honest and said 'Yeah you do sometimes do that.'

For Michelle his attitude conflicted with the value she placed on spending time with friends:

> And so I think that this is something that he doesn't value in that same way as somebody that necessarily has those kind of close friendships. And that has been something that I have expressed or sort of advised him that like this is a major value to me. And the lack of support for that value is a major challenge for me.

Another participant provided an example related to a challenging personnel issue, which involved harassment directed at a staff member who shared information about an incident during an investigation. The participant did not feel that the vice president supported the staff person as much as they could have and let them know that. However, the participant noted during the interview that the most that they could do was share their opinion with their vice president since the decision was ultimately theirs to make. It is not clear from the participant's response if they couched the issue in terms of conflicting values when it was raised with the vice president.

***Considering resigning or reporting the SSAO.*** As noted above, the second core behavior of the Courage to Take Moral Action explored was the willingness to take an action such as resigning or reporting their leader to a higher authority in response to an ethical concern. Thirteen of fifteen participants did not have an example to share regarding this behavior of the Courage to Take Moral action. The two examples provided by participants will be shared below. Additionally, several participants provided examples of the types of actions on the part of their vice president that would cause them to consider resigning or reporting them to a higher authority. Those examples will be described later in this section.

One participant mentioned a personal matter involving their vice president that they confronted them about because it was impacting the vice president's ability to do their job: “I had a very serious conversation about ‘You need to be careful about this not affecting your work.’” But the participant indicated that they would not have discussed the concern with anyone else: “But I would not have violated the trust by reporting that to someone else.” In fact when responding to this question the participant did not provide any specifics about the issue of concern.

Angela, provided an example that involved a previous supervisor, rather than her current boss. He was a senior administrator in her student affairs organization and she declined an opportunity to follow him to another position at the institution after he was promoted, due to concerns she had about his behavior, which may have violated institutional policies. In declining the opportunity she stated that it would not be a good career opportunity for her, but did not share her concerns: “I think I just told them it was for personal reasons. And mostly that I was looking at that point to continue growing my career professionally and that I did not think I would be provided with the opportunity.”

While most participants did not have an example to share in response to this question, several had examples of the circumstances that might cause them to act. For example, Kerry indicated that she would consider taking action if her boss was: “…dishonest, unscrupulous, racist, sexist, something like that…” Erica stated that she loves her job and would that it would take “a lot of crap” for her to consider leaving her position. However she did identify circumstances which would cause her to leave: “…If it gets to the point where I feel I’m being seriously mistreated…and I’ve had this happen in other jobs…the reason I left my previous job and come to work for [her current institution] was for this very thing.” She also identified circumstances under which she would consider reporting her vice president:

> …if I saw that the VP was doing things that were going to harm the [institution] as a whole, harm our division, or was going against all of our strategic goals, was spending money like crazy…it would really have to be something where I was thinking ‘Okay you’re not a good person I just need to report up and tell somebody what I’m seeing.’

Jill also indicated that mistreatment would be something that would compel her to take action: “Well I would say that one thing might be mistreatment of others just that you know a pure lack of respect for who a person is.” However, unlike Erica, she didn’t indicate that the mistreatment needed to be directed toward her in order for her to act. She also stated that lying or misusing funds might spur her to action as well.

As stated earlier, the majority of participants indicated that they did not have an experience in their current position where they either had to talk to their SSAO about the violation of their values or principles, or one where they felt they needed to consider resigning or reporting the actions of their SSAO to a higher authority. A few participants provided insight into why they have not experienced any moral issues with their SSAO. For example, Lisa noted that her vice president was very clear about his values and described him as “very principled” and someone who was “pretty true” to this values.

Maria was more expansive in her rationale for the lack of examples from other participants. She attributes it to the close nature of the relationship between a vice president and their “Assistant to.” According to her, the two individuals have to work well together and at least for her, if there are indications that they are not compatible, she would leave her position:

> But bigger picture I think it kind of goes back…to you know my very first comment that if you don’t have the type of relationship with your VP in this position where you’re almost an extension of them, then it’s not going to work. They’re going to find, I mean I have to believe that if my VP were to leave tomorrow and someone else was hired and we didn’t click…then I would probably find another job for me or would change the reporting structure or I

> would leave. And just not because they did anything wrong, just because we don't click...

She added that the:

> …. "Assistant to" is so close to the VP that they stand behind everything they do and they believe. Or they're not going to be in that position very long. It's just too close of a relationship…It's just not going to work…so I don't think that you would ever get to a place where you would know that something bad had happened.

As mentioned earlier, the importance of a relationship between the SSAO and the "Assistant to" is one of the themes that will be discussed later in this chapter.

**Potential Additional Courageous Follower Attributes**

The second research question that was explored in this study is as follows: *Are there additional behaviors displayed by those in the "Assistant to" role that are not included in Chaleff's model?* In order to answer this question I posed the following question to the participants: *Considering the work that you do and Chaleff's dimensions of a Courageous Follower--Courage to Assume Responsibility, Courage to Serve, Courage to Challenge, Courage to Participate in Transformation, Courage to Take Moral Action--are there any additional behaviors that you would propose adding and why?* In addition to this question, I also analyzed the codes for each interview to determine if there were additional attributes that were not included in Chaleff's model. Eight of the participants suggested behaviors that they felt were missing from the model in response to the question posed. It is worth noting that all of those who mentioned behaviors that had were possibly missing, had been working in the student affairs field for at least 10 years or longer. Five of these had been in their position at least four years, including Mary who had been in her position for 17.

The behaviors mentioned included the notion of "executive presence" which was suggested by Joseph: "…I think that only thing I would add is this notion of Executive Presence that Sylvia Ann Hewlett talked about in her research and writing." According to Joseph, Hewlett's (2014) work is helpful for someone in the "Assistant to" role:

> …I think if you're going to serve a VP in the role of "Assistant to" then you have to have a sense of what it means to be an executive. Not necessarily that you are training to be one, or that you are one, but that you know a lot of the small stuff that we think are important they don't care about….they're thinking about such bigger pictures. And that, the trust they have in you to make those small minutia decisions is really what they put you in that role for.

Tanya suggested that the Courage to Learn the Culture:

> You know when I think about one of the most important pieces for me in my role at my current institution, it's about the Courage to Learn the Culture….to really be a learner of the institution and then to utilize that to be able to navigate change.

She felt that it was important for staff in this role to learn about their institutions and use that information to build alliances with others in the institution: "So it's really figuring out like 'Okay who do I build these alliances with to make this change happen that I want to see happen?'

Monique suggested that it was important for "Assistant to's" to demonstrate the Courage to be Your Authentic Self at Work:

> I think this is going to probably show, this is probably showing my growth here in this area, I think it's like the Courage to Be Your Authentic Self at Work. I think that a lot of times people have their work self and then they have their personal self. I think that in our work you know I think it's important to bring your full self to the work and to allow people to see you.

**The Courage to be Humble**. While eight participants suggested new behaviors in response to the question asked, some of these behaviors were only mentioned once, and they were described above. However, there were a few individuals who suggested new behaviors that were the same or very similar to each other. There seemed to be some consensus around behaviors that could demonstrate the Courage to be Humble. For example, Lisa suggested that it is important that an “Assistant to” not be competitive in their relationship with others:

> I think somebody to be successful in that model needs to not be competitive fundamentally. I think that somebody successfully being a Courageous Follower needs to be collaborative and needs to be working, needs to be able to keep their ego in check. So you can’t be somebody who needs to take credit for everything, because a lot of the work that you’re doing, you’re not putting your name on it and that needs to be sit well with you.

Kerry at first suggested that the Courage to Be Wrong (which is somewhat addressed in the Courage to Serve as Knowing When You Don’t Know) should be added to the model. She felt that it was important for a person to be able to admit that they do not have all of the answers and be willing to learn new things in order to help the organization be successful:

> I think I would offer one. I think the Courage to Be Wrong, to not have all the answers, to be in a learning mode and resolute that you will develop in an area that’s underdeveloped in order to help the person or the organization be successful.

She added that she believed that in order to do this there was a need for “humility.” This humility would enable a person to be open to constantly learning and be able to admit that they may not have all of the answers:

> So there’s some humility I suppose. I guess that’s what I’m seeing as missing. And I think when you work with students that that would be an important aspect, right?...So I think you have to have this kind of courage to be open about areas that, I wouldn’t say necessarily limitations, but maybe that is somewhat appropriate. I think courage to kind of know that you are always in a mode of learning and refinement….I think we’re all developing beings so you have to also know that you don’t have all the answers so you can’t always be 100 percent right after it and have all the answers.

Mary framed her suggestion as the Courage to Understand It’s Not About You: “I guess the only one I would add would be something like, the Courage to Understand It’s

Not About You." In her opinion this behavioral attribute would help a person determine that they do not always need to share their opinion, even if they have the opportunity to do so. This behavior would help them determine when their input is appropriate and when it is not:

> Knowing what would be a right time for which meeting for if necessary to share my opinion vs. not. Of course everyone has an opinion on everything. But...it's knowing when is the right time…Knowing when is the appropriate time or issue to share vs. not sharing.

In addition to those who suggested the possible addition of a Courageous Follower behavior that is related to the notion of being humble, several participants referenced behaviors during various parts of the interview that are related to the idea of being humble. For example, when responding to a question about how the relationship that Lisa has with her SSAO manifests, she stated that part of her role is to not be in competition with him. She added: "I think that my success-- if he's not successful, I'm not successful." When describing her experience working as an "Assistant to" Vanessa indicated that in addition to loving being a "number two," she also enjoys making her vice president look good. This focus on the success of their vice president was also expressed by others, including Megan and Mary. Angela, when describing her efforts to change how she works with others discussed not focusing on what she wants when working in collaboration with others, but being focused on the intended goal.

When asked what the term "Courageous Follower" means in the context of her role, Monique highlighted the fact that individuals in this position are often behind the scenes and not recognized for their contributions: "And so we're not necessarily in the forefront of getting all the glory. I think we do our work for the greater good to accomplish a mission, which our supervisors do as well." She added that while she thinks that some people in these positions could “lead” but they are willing to stay in the background:

> And so I think that when I think of Courageous Followers I think you’re someone who is willing to kind of take the back seat, even though you could very well lead, but you’re willing to kind of be in the background supporting a greater mission and a leader to get to a vision.

According to Monique, a person who is an “Assistant to” and is a Courageous Follower is one who can “check your ego at the door.” Her comment mirrors Lisa’s, who as noted above, stated that the “Assistant to” must know how to “keep their ego in check.”

In addition to the possible addition of the Courage to Be Humble as a new dimension in the Courageous Follower model, there were a few other behaviors that emerged during the data analysis process which are not currently addressed in the Courageous Follower model. However, unlike the potential Courage to Be Humble, these behaviors could be integrated into parts of the existing model, specifically the Courage to Serve and the Courage to Challenge.

**Expanding the Courage to Serve**. When describing their experience as an “Assistant to,” particularly how they contribute to the success of their vice president and their organizations, and how they demonstrate the various attributes of a Courageous Follower many participants mentioned behaviors that could be integrated into the Courage to Serve. These would include the ability to serve as a confidante; the ability to gather information about the organization to be shared with the SSAO, the ability to share opinions and concerns from other staff with the SSAO, and the ability to build relationships with others for the good of the organization.

***Serving as a confidante for the SSAO.*** Many participants discussed their role as a confidante for their vice president. Some participants discussed it when reflecting on their experience as an “Assistant to.” For example, Michelle discussed having her vice president frequently start conversations with her using the phrase “...well this is confidential information, but….” Megan, when reflecting on how the good relationship she has with her SSAO manifests itself, cited his willingness to share confidential information as one example. Mary discussed her relationship with her vice president as one where she is both a confidante and willing to speak honestly with him:

> And then I’d say I’m seen as like a confidant and someone that the VP you know I can always say to my VP is ‘I will always be honest with you’ I’m not there to brown nose or tell her what she wants to hear.

As noted earlier, several participants discussed that their primary role in managing conflicts between their SSAO and others is being a person that their boss can vent to about others, while knowing that the information will not be shared. While the Courage to Serve addresses the role of the Courageous Follower as a “sounding board” as part of “Knowing When You Don’t Know”, it does not address the role they can play as being someone who the leader can discuss issues with in confidence, including those that are work related or personal in nature (Chaleff, 2009).

***Gathering information for the SSAO***. Several of the participants discussed their role in gathering information about operations or practices within the student affairs organization, or sometimes peer institutions for their SSAO. Information could include summary information about how many students have been served in specific departments, examples of how student affairs units have implemented an institutional directive regarding diversity, or examples policies and practices at peer institutions regarding a specific issue. The current model discusses the follower’s role in providing input as part of the Courage to Challenge, but the focus is more on the follower’s opinion and how they can respond when their input is requested on an issue, rather than how they can gather information about the organization that they have collected, often at the request of the SSAO.

Michelle, when discussing how she contributes to the success of her vice president said "…making sure he has all of the information and understanding throughout the division…." Maria discussed her role in gathering information in connection with an issue that needed approval from her institution's governing board: "So it was working with…our firm and the [Board of Trustees] to pull together all of the information that the Board would need in order to approve such a huge, massive transformation on our campus. So it was working to make—with the VP to make sure he had all the information…" Lisa, when describing how she contributes to the success of her vice president stated "…one of the things that I think I'm skilled at is moving quickly, putting something together when its needed, doing the research that's needed to fully inform any issue or problem that arises."

Monique, when discussing her primary responsibilities mentioned her role in gathering information for her vice president: "…having to pull a lot of data and put together presentations and reports." When discussing how she contributes to the success of her vice president, Monique spoke about responding to a request for information about sexual assault trainings:

> …I was able to jump in, collect all that data from the different departments around our campus to give them exact numbers and specifics so that she could speak to it. So you know what I'm able to do is get my hands on things more quickly for her when she needs to make reports or to advocate for something or make a decision about something. I'm able to get that information to her so I think that helps her do her job.

When providing examples of how she has improved communication processes as part of the Courage to Serve, Tanya highlighted her work to facilitate collecting success data from across the division:

> And so I revamped that entire system and now it's a web-based system so that we can pull reports every single month to get to the VP so she can go to the President's Council and have all of our successes right in front of her to present to them.

***Building relationships with others to benefit the organization.*** A number of participants highlighted the relationships that they have with people within their division and across the institution. Several of these noted how they leverage these relationships for the betterment of the organization. While the Courageous Follower model discusses the importance of relationships as part of the Courage to Serve, the focus is on the relationship between the follower and the leader, as well as the follower's role in encouraging the leader to have relationships with peers. There is no mention of the follower's relationships with others within the organization and how they can be used to further the organization's goals and objectives.

Jill discussed the fact that she has many friends on campus and how she uses those relationships to do her job: "Because you make a lot of friends and a lot of allies on campus if you're nice and get to know people who can help you when you're scheduling something last minute and there's no rooms and you know you have a friend in the room reservation system who can help you out." Although a primary part of Jill's role is scheduling meetings, her relationships extended beyond those in similar roles: "So I have positive relationships with the people who are in my similar role, as well as with a lot of directors on campus. As well as a lot of our – well our assistant vice presidents in student affairs…."

Megan discussed the relationships that she has in various ways. For example, she first mentioned relationships as an example of how she seeks personal growth by "trying to branch out to different areas across campus and forge relationships with different leaders across campus." She noted that she has relationships with many vice presidents at the institution. She later talked about how she can use her relationships to convene people on a particular issue. "I think just bringing different people to the table if the need arises. Using the relationships that I already have to bring people together."

***Expanding the Courage to Challenge.*** A number of participants discussed their role in serving as a conduit to their SSAO for sharing problems or concerns that they hear about from staff in the division, or elsewhere in the institution. Some discussed their role in letting their vice president know about the mood of the division or the broader institution with regard to specific issues. "Assistant to's" who perform this role are providing their boss with "intelligence" regarding how people are feeling within the student affairs organization or beyond. This is often information that individuals are unlikely to are directly with the SSAO. The "Assistant to's" role in providing "intelligence" to their vice president is an important one and is not currently included in the Courageous Follower model, but could be part of the Courage to Challenge, which currently includes providing feedback and input to a leader. This role will be discussed more in the Emerging Themes and Roles section, later this chapter.

Mary discussed her efforts to share the division's vision with the rest of the institution, and her ability to bring back what she hears from others to share with her boss: "And so helping to share their vision with the rest of the university, and also be able to bring back to them when I hear what's going on—concerns or good things." Vanessa, when discussing what she sees as her primary job duties, discussed her efforts to keep her vice president informed about what's happening that she should be aware of: "…what I feel like I do is I really get ahead of things for the VP. Or I also keep her in the look of things that you know 'word on the street' things that are happening, things to be concerned about."

Michelle discussed her role in providing insight to the vice president about how people are feeling in the division: "The other thing that I will say is that I think I also provide him with a lot of insight on maybe how people are feeling in the division or issues that might be coming up that he hasn't necessarily heard of…." Erica, when discussing her job responsibilities said: "…he relies more heavily on my opinion and…keeping an eye on how things are going and things people might say to me, but not necessarily to him…I'm kind of his eyes and ears in the division…" When discussing how she contributes to the success of her vice president Erica discussed her efforts to ensure that when in meetings with other senior leaders that her SSAO is not surprised by issues that come up pertaining to student affairs:

> I try to make sure if I hear something that I think he's going to get caught—I don't ever want him to hear something in the presence of the executive council that pertains to our area, and obviously we're never going to catch everything, but if I know of something, he heard it outside of where I know of that I'd be really disappointed.

Several participants discussed the willingness of staff to share information with them, when in turn makes it possible for them to share what they have learned with their SSAO. For Michelle the willingness of others to share information with them was related to being a colleague who understands the work that they do: "I think that they're more open talking to me than you know obviously they're not going to come to the vice president and say ‘Hey this is what’s going on.’ Lisa discussed how she can provide a “safe place” for staff who report to the vice president to share their frustrations. She added that “…sometimes people can say things to me that they don’t feel comfortable saying directly to him [the vice president].”

## Contributions to the Success of the Student Affairs Organization

The third research question is as follows: *In the opinion of the “Assistant to” in student affairs in what ways does their role contribute to the organizational effectiveness and goal achievement of their respective student affairs organization*.” In order to answer this question the following question was asked of all participants “How do you think your role helps your student affairs organization meet its goals and objectives?” I should note that this question was not placed in the context of the Courageous Follower model, but some of their responses reflected aspects of the model. These instances of alignment with the model will be highlighted later in this section.

All of the participants provided an answer to this question and many identified multiple ways that they contributed to the organizational effectiveness and goal achievement of their organization. The most common response were sharing of information and serving as a central point of contact within the organization, which was mentioned five times. The second most common responses were having a comprehensive view of the student affairs organization, helping to articulate the division’s goals and objectives, and overseeing core functions, such as budget and communication. I will share examples of each of these below.

**Facilitating the sharing of information and serving as a central point of contact**. During the course of their interviews several participants highlighted their role in sharing information, responding to questions, and being a central point of contact as one of the ways that they contribute to their organization's success. Some of the examples that fit into this category demonstrate the "Organizing Communication Processes" behavior of the Courage to Serve. The "Assistant to's" are enhancing communication within their organization. To the extent that playing this role prevents individuals from seeking assistance from the SSAO, being a central point of contact could be considered as part of the Courage to Serve, particularly with regard to "Conserving the Leader's Energy," and "The Responsibilities of Gatekeeping."

For example, Monique discussed her role in responding to inquiries and sharing information that comes into the vice president's office to the appropriate people or units within student affairs. "…I've kind of almost sort of been in the role of like a Chief of Staff in that I'm able to kind of take that information, whatever's coming in, and help farm it that out to where it needs to go." Jennifer discussed being the "knower of everything" and how she serves as a resource for people within her student affairs division and elsewhere within the institution:

> …anytime people in our division have questions about things, or people outside of our division have questions about the things that we do in student affairs I have to know. I have to have the knowledge and be able to answer those questions.

Kerry discussed her role in sharing information that comes from the vice president with his direct reports and serving as a key link between the two: "…I do a lot of pivoting. So information comes to me from the VP and then I can pivot and communicate that to all of his other direct reports. And I can…go between the direct reports and the vice president." She also highlighted her role in "filling in the blanks" for staff who have questions so that they vice president does not have to respond.

Angela frames her role as a central point of contact as one where she can provide assistance if the SSAO is not available, which enables their division to respond in "real time" to student needs. For Erica she sees her role as a "center cog" within the organization, which helps her facilitate the coordination of projects by ensuring that needed tasks are accomplished:

> Well I think that I'm that center cog that's moving and I try to, so if we have a common project that we're all working on together…I'm kind of looking at everything. So I'm the one that setting up the meetings and saying *'Hey did we figure this out yet?'* And that gentle prodding to move everybody as we're moving forward…

**Helping to articulate goals and objectives.** Three of the participants stated that they contribute to the success of their division through their role in articulating goals and objectives, and/or measuring to what extent their organization's goals and objectives have been met. For example, Tanya her role in helping the division articulate its goals and objectives stemmed from planning the student affairs leadership retreat: "I played a critical role in the planning of our student affairs leadership team retreat and at our Student Affairs Council retreat, where we actually have redone our mission, our vision, came up with our themes and goals."

Vanessa cited her experience helping her division document their goals and objectives: Ah well we have some now. That's a start...what I feel like I've done in terms of mission and goals and objectives and outcomes and things like that is that often the thing that's lowest on someone's priority list is to write them down.

**Having a comprehensive view of the student affairs organization.** Three of participants identified their ability to provide a comprehensive view of their student affairs organization as a way that they contribute to its success. Because of their unique role, they are one of the few leaders in the organization, other than the SSAO, who is not responsible for specific units or a set of units. For example, one participant discussed how the fact that they were a director in their student affairs organization previously provided them with their perspective:

> Well I think I am not only using the knowledge base from my peers being a former director and being able to advocate for some of them at the table that I sit at now…So I can advocate for things that I know my colleagues have said to me in the past were things that were roadblocks or barriers.

Angela discussed the fact that she is very knowledgeable about all of the units within her division of student affairs, which aids in her ability to ensure that the division's work is aligned with the institution's goals. "…[I'm] able to see things from that 10,000 foot view, look at the overall organization of student affairs, match that with University goals and missions and help direct leadership and administration within the vice president's office on accomplishing that."

**Providing oversight of core operational functions.** Three participants highlighted their role in providing oversight for core operational functions within their division of student affairs. To the extent that participants provided examples of making improvements in some of these core processes, as some have done, it would demonstrate the "Improving Processes" behavior of the Courage to Assume Responsibility.

Vanessa mentioned her role in helping the division enhance its assessment practices. Joseph discussed his role in centralizing many business functions within his student affairs division which allows for a more streamlined operation, which was also shared as an example of improving processes earlier in this chapter. He worked to create divisional processes in the areas of technology, budget, communication and marketing so that units could focus on program planning and service delivery, rather than attending to these tasks. Maria discussed her role in overseeing resources for her student affairs division, particularly human resources, finances, technology, and marketing:

> I oversee the resources I guess from the HR perspective. So from the hiring…whether it's technology, whether it's marketing, whether it's the hiring, or firing in some cases rarely, and budget management. So I ensure that all of the resources are in place so that departments can be successful.

**Contributions to the Success of the SSAO**

The fourth and final research question of this study is as follows: *In the opinion of the "Assistant to" in student affairs in what ways do they contribute to the success of the SSAO for whom they work?* In order to answer this question, participants were all asked the following question: *How do you think you help contribute to the success of your SSAO?* As noted with the previous research question, this question was not placed in the context of the Courageous Follower model, but some of their responses reflected behaviors of the model. These instances of alignment with the model will be highlighted later in this section.

All of the participants provided an answer to this question and many identified multiple ways that they contribute to the success of their SSAO. The most common response was serving as a sounding board for the SSAO, which was mentioned five times. The next most common responses gathering information for their SSAO about the work of their organization (this was also a behavior mentioned as part of the findings in the second research question), gathering "intelligence" gained from others in the organization or within the institution that should be shared with the SSAO (this was also mentioned as part of the findings in the second research question), and they help to "take things off of the plate" of their SSAO, which frees them up to focus on more important tasks. Each of these were mentioned four times. These contributions manifest themselves in different ways and examples of each will be provided below.

**Serving as a sounding board for the SSAO**. Five participants described themselves as a sounding board for their SSAO as an example of how they contribute to his or her success. They cited the fact that their vice president can bounce ideas off of them, talk to them about confidential issues, and vent their frustrations as way that they help to contribute to the success of their vice president. Chaleff (2009) briefly discusses a follower's ability to be a sounding board as part of the "Knowing When You Don't Know" behavior of the Courage to Serve:

> If we are close to the leader, we can serve as a sounding board, reflecting back what we hear without pretending to have expertise we lack…In this way we can help a leader think through difficult issues or prepare for critical events despite our lack of expertise on a particular subject (p. 73).

The role of the "Assistant to" as a sounding board will be discussed in more detail in the Themes and Roles section of this chapter. Below are three examples provided by participants of how they contribute to the success of their SSAO by serving as a sounding board.

Vanessa mentioned that she is able to serve as a sounding board for her vice president due to the level of trust that exists between them. She also highlighted the fact that there is no one else within the organization that her SSAO can have honest conversations with and confide in:

> ...I mentioned earlier that there's an extreme amount of trust between us and so I'm able to really honestly be a sounding board…and we talk about a lot of things. We talk about staffing issues, we talk about things that happen at Cabinet, we talk about really highly confidential things that I don't, there's no other person— perhaps maybe a spouse right?--- but there's no other person that she can talk to about those things and sort of process.

Kerry discussed her role as a sounding board and how it contributes to her vice president's decision-making process:

> I help them make decisions. I hear what their feedback is, we do a lot of you know let me think this through. And we kind of play off of each other if you will. And I think that having a sounding board, that ability to listen to what you're going through, to weigh the options, to provide information that you may have that they may not have.

While most participants who discussed being a sounding board did so in the context of decision-making and problem solving, Jill provided a different type of example. She noted that she serves as a sounding board very often for her vice president as he is preparing to deliver a presentation: "He wanted me to review a presentation that he was giving. So he gave the presentation and I listened like an audience and then gave him feedback on his presentation. "

**Gathering information for the SSAO.** As mentioned previously, four participants highlighted the role they play in gathering information and data for their SSAO as a way that they contribute to their success. This role is not addressed by the Courageous Follower model, as suggested earlier in this chapter. Two examples that were provided as examples of how the participants contributed to the success of their SSAO are provided below.

Denise mentioned the role she plays in providing information to her vice president that allows her to argue for resources for their division of student affairs: "…I can give her information that will help her make a compelling case for why we need resources in a particular area or why a particular issue …is something that the rest of the University needs to pay attention to." She commented further that she helps to gather evidence of the work that her student affairs organization does in order to counteract those who think that their contributions are not substantive:

> I also help by gathering the evidence that we are doing good work in Student Affairs. There are of course people on the campus who feel like it's just the arts and crafts side of the house or we're just a group of huggy, fluffy-type people where there's really not a whole lot of value in what we do. And I'd like to think that what I can provide for her is…documentation, evidence that no really these out of class experiences…the things that they're doing through their activities and in residence halls and whatnot are those that are actually a key part of the experience that they have that contributes to their growth and learning.

Monique highlighted her ability to collect data quickly as a way that she contributes to the success of her vice president and gathering information about sexual assault prevention as an example: "I was able to go 'Okay I'll get that information for you.' I was able to jump in, collect data from the different departments around our campus to give them [the vice president] exact numbers and specifics so that she could speak to it."

**Providing intelligence to the SSAO.** Four participants highlighted their ability to provide "intelligence" to their vice president about what's going on in their division with regard to morale or concerns from staff as how they contribute to the success of their vice president. This subject was discussed earlier in this chapter as one of the behaviors that is not currently addressed in the Courageous Follower model, although it is closely related to Chaleff's (2009) discussion of "Giving A Leader Feedback" and "Giving a Leader Input" which are both part of the Courage to Serve. It will also be discussed later in the Themes and Roles section in more detail. Two examples that were provided as examples of how the participants contributed to the success of their SSAO are below:

For example, Erica discussed how she leverages her various relationships across campus to play this role:

> So I have interactions with the [a department focused on sustainability and the environment], I have interactions with our delivery facilities, and so having those contacts and those ears that I can hear things I'm able to kind of bring things to him that he might need to know….

Michelle stated that she contributes to the success of her SSAO by providing him insight into what's happening within the division: "…I also provide him with a lot of insight on maybe how people are feeling in the division or issues that might be coming up that he hasn't necessarily heard of…" She also stated that her ability to be honest with her vice president is important since it allows him to know what's happening within the division. The role that honesty plays in the work of an "Assistant to" will be discussed later in the Themes and Roles section of this chapter.

**"Taking things off of their plate."** Four participants in the study highlighted their contribution to the success of their vice SSAO by discussing their ability to "take things off of their plate." For some this meant being able to handle tasks, such as solving problems that were not a good use of the vice president's time or giving attention to an issue on behalf of the vice president's office, without having to involve the vice president. For others, they referred to instances where they have represented the vice president at an event so that they did not have to attend. This role is not specifically addressed in Chaleff's (2009) Courageous Follower model, but it closely related to several behaviors of the Courage to Serve, including "The Responsibilities of Gatekeeping," "Conserving a Leader's Energy," and "Acting in the Leader's Name."

Tanya discussed her ability to provide a "high touch" on behalf of the vice president's office when dealing with students who have experienced a loss of a loved one:

> …making sure that the Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs is reaching out to families, whether you know it's reaching out to students if they've experienced a loss of a loved one. So having high touch from the Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs was one of the reasons they created the position to make sure that our students and their families knew that we take student success and any concerns that students or families have very seriously.

She also discussed her experience standing in for the vice president at ribbon cuttings, representing him and the division on committees, and delivering speeches on his behalf. Mary discussed her ability to handle tasks on behalf of her vice president, as well as her ability to identify someone else in the division who can respond on their behalf: "And I feel like the more I can take off of her plate and help, not necessarily do myself, do some of it, but also figure…who else it could be moved to with the division's staff." Angela discussed her ability to respond to student or family concerns so that the vice president can focus on other priorities:

> A lot of student concerns or family concerns that come into the vice president's level office can be addressed by someone in that role or by me in that role. And I think that that just helps take the burden and the workload off of the vice president who has certainly their own list of priorities and things that they need to accomplish on a day-to-day basis.

Kerry discussed her ability to handle tasks for her vice president in such a way that he can be confident they will be taken care of properly: "Another way that I make them successful is that…they can pretty much have confidence that if they're handing something off to me that it will get done and that they're not going to have to worry about that, think about that." She mentioned the role that trust plays in the work that she does on behalf of her SSAO: "So certainly a high level of trust. And I think when you have good people…. they [the leader] don't have to worry about those details so that they're brain power, if you will, and energy is freed up for other positions. "

## Themes and Roles

During the data analysis process one primary theme, and three sub-themes emerged. Also, two roles played by the "Assistant to" within their student affairs organization also emerged during the data analysis process. These roles are not ones that would typically be included in a job description for an "Assistant to." The themes and the roles presented below are not the result of responses to specific questions asked, or are not merely a restatement of findings from the four research questions which were shared in the previous question. Rather they emerged from analyzing the responses that participants gave at different parts of the interview. For example, while participants provided specific responses to the question regarding how they contribute to the success of their SSAO, some participants also provided related examples in response to other questions.

The themes and roles presented her provide some insight into the nature of the role of the "Assistant to" an SSAO, the contributions they can make to their SSAO and to the organization where they work, and how the "Assistant to" does their work. In some ways the themes and roles also provide insight into how these positions can be maximized for optimum benefit.

Before discussing each of the themes and roles in depth, I will first provide an overview of them. The primary theme that emerged from analyzing the responses from the participants is the importance of relationships to the role of the work of the "Assistant to." Within this theme are several sub-themes, including the importance of the relationship with the SSAO (and how that relationship manifests), the importance of relationships with other staff, and the role of honesty and trust as a critical feature of the relationship between the "Assistant to" and the SSAO and other staff. The analysis of the data seem to indicate that the relationships that the "Assistant to" has facilitates their ability to play specific roles within their student affairs organization. These roles include serving as a confidante or sounding board for the SSAO, which in turn facilitates their ability to provide input and opinions to the SSAO. The "Assistant to" also serves as a confidante for staff, which in turn facilitates their ability to provide "intelligence" to the SSAO. In the rest of this section I will share more information about the themes and roles.

**Themes**

**The importance of relationships.** The primary theme that emerged from the data analysis is that relationships are important. Relationships for an "Assistant to" manifest in two primary ways--the relationship that they have with their SSAO and the relationship that they have with others within their student affairs division, as well as their institution. These relationships seem to play a critical role in the work of the "Assistant to" and set the stage for their ability to demonstrate several behaviors of being a Courageous Follower.

***Relationship between the "Assistant to" and other staff.*** As mentioned above there are two aspects of relationships that emerged during the data analysis. The first one that will be discussed is the role that relationships with staff within student affairs organizations and elsewhere at the institution plays in the work of an "Assistant to." While these relationships are important, it also seems that the capacity to build them, while not specifically discussed by the participants, is important as well. During the course of the interviews, several participants mentioned the relationships that they have with others and how it assists them to do their job. For example, Jennifer referred to the importance of the relationships that she has in her work: “I know a little bit about everything that’s going on at the University…I know all the directors in our unit, I know all of the VPs. I know the president. Those relationships I think have definitely strengthened Student Affairs.” She also discussed how she tries to build relationships: “I think for me something that has worked well is just a reputation for being friendly and nice and helpful, so if anybody has a question I am definitely happy to answer it or find an answer.”

Megan discussed the relationships she has with others in several contexts during the interview. When discussing how she has engaged in personal growth as part of the Courage to Assume Responsibility, she mentioned that she has intentionally tried to “…branch out to different areas across campus…and forge relationships with different leaders across campus.” When discussing her role in influencing the culture of her student affairs organization she mentioned the importance of building collaborative relationships with colleagues. In response to a question about how she had improved communication processes, as part of the Courage to Serve, Megan discussed her ability to bring groups of people together to address an issue and how she used her existing relationships to do so: “I think just bringing different people together to the table if the need arises. Using the relationships that I have already to bring people together.”

Mary identified herself as a “relationship builder” when describing how she helps her student affairs organization achieve its goals and objectives. She uses the relationships that she has built over her 17 years in her position to further her work, including in the area of strategic planning:

> And so I'm able to connect and make things happen quickly that need to happen…Part of that relationship building is when I do need to, to search or lead some areas of strategic planning, I'm pretty good about bringing the right people to the table to get things out about and implemented.

***Relationship between the "Assistant to" and the SSAO.*** Nine participants out of 15 referred to the good relationship they had with their boss as they answered at least one of the questions during the interview. Three participants inferred, and later confirmed that they had a good relationship with their vice president. After the first few interviews I noticed that participants were referring to their relationship with their boss at various points in the interview. I began asking the remaining participants how their relationship with their SSAO manifested itself. In some instances this question was asked following their reference to having a good relationship with their SSAO and in other instances it was asked later in the interview.

Most of the participants raised the issue of the relationship they had with their SSAO without being prompted. For example, when asked to describe her experience as an "Assistant to," Maria responded: "Very positive. I think the relationship between the [Assistant to] and the VP in this specific role you have to really click." She added: "…with a position like this, you really are an extension of the VP and you have to gel or it, the relationship doesn't work." According to Maria, she was "very fortunate to have really fabulous relationships with the previous VP…" as well as her current one.

Mary discussed having a good relationship with her vice president in the context of discussing how she engages in self-assessment and personal growth. Their relationship allows her SSAO to give her honest feedback: "So we have a pretty good relationship where I can say to her and she can say to me 'Did I do this bad? Is this wrong? Is this not coming across the way we want it to come across.' In a related vein, Lisa discussed the good relationship that she has with her vice president when she discussed her role in helping to manage conflicts that involve her vice president and others. That relationship empowers her to discuss concerns that have been shared with her regarding how others perceive the vice president. An example of this was provided as part of the findings related to the Courage to Serve. Denise also discussed the relationship she has with her SSAO in the context of her role in managing conflicts between her vice president and others. Because of their relationship, her vice president can talk to her about her frustrations with others: "..there's one thing that I can think of that I know she has complimented me for and that is she will sometimes talk things out, some of her frustrations out with me because we have a good relationship in that regard." Michelle, when discussing how she lets her vice president know when other staff are frustrated with him or his decisions stated:" …I have a very open relationship to be able to go and say "This is how people are feeling.'"

*How good relationships with SSAO manifest themselves***.** As noted earlier, most participants were asked at a point during their interview how their relationship with their SSAO manifests itself if they explicitly mentioned that they had a good relationship, or made other comments where it could be reasonably inferred that they had a good relationship. The most frequent characteristics included the ability to communicate openly with one's SSAO, as well as the ability to engage in conversations about personal issues, such as family matters. A few participants mentioned that their relationship with their SSAO was demonstrated by their SSAO's concern about their professional development, a willingness to share confidential information with them and assign them more work with greater responsibilities.

Both Angela and Kerry indicated that they explicitly discussed the nature of their relationship with their SSAO. When asked how the relationship that Angela has with her SSAO manifests she stated:

> I think we talk about it. I think that we are really open with each other and we tell each other how much we value the working relationship that we have, how much we value the feedback and the thoughtfulness and just the work that we both do to help support each other. And I know that he has given me that feedback directly before and I've had the chance to respond to that.

Kerry's vice president, who was new in his role, stated that they needed to have an open relationship that was based on trust in order to work together. She recalls him saying:

> I have to trust you, I have to assume that you and I have a sacred trust that I can say anything that I need to say to you and you can say anything that you need to say to me and that we keep each other's confidence and that we have this open communication style.

The statement by Kerry's vice president aligned with her prior experience working with other vice presidents.

Trust between the "Assistant to" and the SSAO was one of the ways that participants were able to identify that they had a good relationship with their vice president. However, for several participants the issue of trust was mentioned at various points during their interview. As a result, the issue of trust has emerged as a sub-theme, which will be discussed later in this section. However, a few examples of how trust played a role in the relationship between the "Assistant to" and the SSAO are provided below.

Many participants, in addition to Kerry, discussed the role that trust played in how the good relationship with their SSAO manifested. Maria, for example discussed how the trust that exists between her and her vice president allows her to be confident when responding to an issue on his behalf. For Michelle, the trust between her and her vice president enables him to give her additional assignments that are more challenging and complex:

> …he trusts me and is always willing to give me more work. I think for me it was looking at, as a young employee and an 'Assistant to' role, that he would give me projects that were probably more fitting of an Assistant Vice President or Vice President.

As mentioned above Michelle stated that the trust that existed between her and her vice president enabled him to give her additional assignments. For several other participants, receiving additional assignments was also a sign that there was a good relationship between them and their SSAO. For example, Kerry discussed how her workload increased, as did the importance of the work, as her relationship grew with her vice president: "And I think that the only thing that marks kind of a relationship progression as you suggest is that you know the volume of work or the importance or the prioritization or the sensitivity of a topic would come to me." Joseph reported that as the relationship between his vice president and him developed he was involved in more "big picture" discussions, was asked to represent the division at more meetings that were outside of his normal committee work, and was given more exposure on the student affairs cabinet as a result of his role in several projects.

A few participants discussed that they could tell they had a good relationship with their SSAO because it seemed that they took a genuine interest in them as a person. For Erica this meant that they had conversations about their families and pets. For Jennifer, her vice president's interest in her development as a professional is a signal that they have a good relationship: "…he's always saying 'You know Jennifer you need to—you should do this, you should do that, you need experience here, I want to make sure that you’re getting the most of your time in this role.’ For Monique it meant that her vice president indicated that she cared about her and her life outside of work:

> She cares about you, she cares about you outside of work, she makes time for you and she’s always looking for ways to get to know you and challenge you…I mean she knows stuff about me that a lot of people don’t know in my world…And that’s because I feel that I can trust her to help me manage some of the issues or concerns that I have.

Another quality of a good relationship between an “Assistant to” and their SSAO is that they can communicate openly. Their open communication enables the “Assistant to” and the SSAO to talk about “anything.” For Erica, as she was in the process of building a relationship with a new vice president who started less than a year before the interview, this meant feeling comfortable enough talk about a range of issues:

> When I’m getting to the point where I’m comfortable with them, we’re talking back and forth, they’re feeling like they can be open with me, the conversation is comfortable, we’re talking about personal things like ‘How is your family, how’s’–we both have dogs and all that fun stuff.

For Denise the open nature of the relationship with her and her vice president allows them to talk about frustrations with their work or other issues that are on their mind. They often work after hours and the open nature of their relationship allows them to engage with each other in a fun and relaxed manner at the office and outside of work:

> Well we you know we’re often here a little bit after hours and we have a good time together. We can talk about what’s going on, the frustrations of the day or whatever it is that we’re working on, but it’s very open. It doesn’t feel forced to talk about those things. Both you know professionally and also just how we feel about what’s going on. We’ve socialized outside of work.

***Trust and honesty.*** When considering the important characteristics of the relationship between the “Assistant to” and their SSAO and others there are two that stand out—trust and honesty. Trust and honesty were mentioned several times during the course of the interviews, not only when participants were specifically asked to discuss how their relationship manifested with their SSAO. Based on their comments it appears that while relationships with their SSAO is important, as are relationships with others within their organizations and institutions, it is also important that those relationships be characterized by trust and honesty, as the presence of those factors facilitates their ability to do their work, as well as demonstrate some behaviors of being a Courageous Follower.

*Trust.* While most participants either explicitly mentioned trust or alluded to it as it related to their relationship with their SSAO, some did so in regard to their relationship with others at their institution. For example, Kerry, when discussing the Courage to Assume Responsibility mentioned her ability to commit staff to attend a meeting or event as an example of how she has shown initiative. She said that the trust that staff have for her allows her to confidently commit them to appear at certain events or meetings: I don't have to check in. I can just pretty much say 'Yeah we'll make that happen.' And I think people trust my decision-making."

Michelle, when discussing her role in influencing the culture of her organization as part of the Courage to Assume Responsibility, mentioned that her opinion is valued and sought out by directors within her student affairs organization:

> …within the sort of director circle…I definitely find that my opinion is a valued one, one that is often sought out by those individuals. I think that oftentimes, good or bad, they feel comfortable venting to me about challenges with our VP or you know another department within our division.

Although she did not specifically mention trust, it was implied by her comments.

Several participants discussed how explicit or implicit trust between them and their SSAO enabled them to not only do their work, but to carry out some behaviors of being a Courageous Follower. For example, when providing a rationale for why most participants did not have an example of having to demonstrate the Courage to Take Moral

Action, Maria attributed it to the importance of trust in their relationship. For Maria, trust is an implicit aspect of the SSAO-“Assistant to” relationship and as such they should be able to talk about anything, including ethical concerns. Jennifer, while responding to questions as part of the Courage to Serve, referred to herself as a “trusted person” and that her vice president “…tells me a lot of confidential things, including confidential feelings he may have for some of his colleagues.” When discussing how she demonstrates the Courage to Serve, Lisa mentioned that the trust that her SSAO has for her allows her to take the initiative to write communications in his name: “I don’t just write for him, I’ll write in what I believe to be his voice and he trusts me enough to kind of write in a manner that he would also write.”

One participant referred to trust and how it relates to their relationship to their vice president and their ability to be a Courageous Follower in two distinct ways. The participant discussed trust as it relates to their ability to speak or act on their boss’s behavior without consulting and as it relates to not sharing a serious concern about their vice president with higher authorities. The participant indicated that they are still in the process of building a relationship with the vice president, although they have worked together for a little more than two years. When discussing the Courage to Serve and how they discern whether they can speak or act on the vice president’s behalf, the participant indicated that while not afraid to make decisions, they currently lack the authority to do so. According to them this will change when they have earned the vice president’s trust: “And I also think it’s a matter of the vice president deciding when…I’ve established trust, that it’s there.” Once the participant knows that they are trusted, they are willing to make decisions on the vice president’s behalf.

While the participant was discussing the Courage to Take Moral Action and whether they ever considered resigning or reporting their boss because of something that they had done, the participant indicated that they did not have that experience. Although they did mention that there was an issue that concerned them regarding a personal challenge that the vice president was experiencing. The participant indicated that they would not have reported their concerns because it would have violated the trust between them and the vice president, although they earlier indicated that they did not feel that they had earned the vice president's trust yet.

*Honesty.* Several participants used the term "honesty" to also characterize how they and their SSAO relate to each other. For example, when discussing her job responsibilities Mary stated that her vice president knows that she will be honest with her when she seeks her opinion and will not just tell her what she wants to hear. Later, when discussing how she contributes to the success of her vice president, she again highlighted the importance of honesty: "…I believe they feel like they can trust me to always be honest with them.

Angela alluded to the value of honesty in her relationship with her vice president when discussing the Courage to Participate in Transformation. She stated that her relationship is such that she can tell her vice president when she's upset or frustrated or mad about something and they can have a conversation about how she feels. She adds that this goes both ways and that from time to time her vice president will say 'Listen can I just be honest with you for a minute? This is how I really feel.' Kerry highlighted the role that honesty plays in her ability to challenge her vice president. "….for this job to be effective and useful you have to have an open honesty. You have to be very honest." She went on to say how her ability to be honest helps her give her vice president advice that may run counter to decisions he intends to make.

Monique provided an example of how honesty manifests in her relationship with her vice president when discussing the Courage to Challenge and the extent to which she has offered her feedback. She discussed what she does if her vice president has not gotten back to her on something where there is a deadline looming:

> ….I will let her know immediately, 'Look you're driving me crazy, I need to get this done, I need your attention or I need you to do this now.' And so she knows when I'm having those moments that it's time to kind of focus and I've kind of reached my limit.

She later mentioned that she regularly talks to her vice president about how their different work styles interfere with each other's progress. When discussing how she knows that she has a good relationship with her boss, she cited the presence of honesty:

> I think we can be really honest with each other and it be ok. We can say some things to one another, not necessarily get our feelings hurt, and know that the intentions are good and at the end of the day I know she has my back and she knows I have hers.

**Roles**

As mentioned earlier in this section, the analysis of the data appear to suggest that the relationships the "Assistant to" has with the SSAO and with other staff within the organization or institution enables them to play two roles: serving as a confidante or sounding board for the SSAO, and serving as a confidante for other staff. These two roles also appear to facilitate the ability of the "Assistant to" to provide input and opinions to the SSAO and to gather "intelligence" from staff that they then can share with the SSAO.

**Serving as a confidante for staff.** Several participants discussed their role as a confidante for staff. This role allowed staff to "vent" to them about their frustrations or concerns. For example, Michelle stated that staff "…feel comfortable venting to me about challenges with our vice president or…with another department within our division." Vanessa stated that staff can talk to her honestly about problems that they are experiencing.

Lisa indicated that her vice president's direct reports are able to express their frustration with him, to her. She provides a "safe place to express frustration." Because of her proximity to the vice president, she noted that sharing their concerns with her allows it to be elevated to the vice president's level. Additionally Lisa, when discussing the Courage to Serve, mentioned that staff will share things with her with an expectation that she share it with her vice president. "….sometimes people can say things to me that they don't feel comfortable saying directly to him…Sometimes they…expect me to deliver the message in a way that it will be received and understood." Such was the case when there was a perception that her vice president was not sufficiently engaged in senior leadership meetings.

The willingness of staff to share their concerns with Erica is a way that she helps her vice president manage conflicts as part of the Courage to Serve. As she was quoted as saying earlier in this chapter, she allows staff to vent with her, but then tries to tries to help them view the issue another way as a way of diffusing tension.

**Serving as a confidante or sounding board for the SSAO.** The SSAO's role as a sounding board or confidante was also discussed as part of the second research question as a behavior that could be added to the Courage to Serve. Some participants, such as Vanessa, explicitly used the term "sounding board" when responding to various questions asked during the interview while others, such as Mary, used the term "confidante" or referred to their vice president's comfort level in confiding in them. For example, when discussing how her relationship with her vice president manifests, Lisa stated "…I am a sounding board, but I think that he trusts that I give him honest and balanced feedback." For Maria being a sounding board enables her to contribute to the success of her vice president by assisting with his decision-making: "I mean I think with my vice president specifically…being also his sounding board like 'Hey this is where I'm thinking about going.' This allows her to play "Devil's Advocate" and offer feedback on his potential decisions.

Jennifer discussed her role as sounding board, as well as being someone with whom her vice president can engage in confidential conversations. Her ability to play these roles is how she helps her vice president manage conflicts with others within the organization:

> I think that the main example is just be the sounding board…I'm a very trusted person. He tells me a lot of confidential things, including confidential feelings he may have for some of his colleagues…sometimes he needs to vent and rant about something and like you know he knows its confidential with me and I'm not going to go and spread rumors or share secrets about what he said.

Michelle and Mary also discussed their roles as confidantes for their respective vice presidents, while also serving as a sounding board. When discussing her experience as an "Assistant to" Michelle characterized many of the conversations that she has with her vice president as being confidential. When discussing her experience as an "Assistant to" Mary noted that her vice president sees her "like a confidante" and someone who will always be honest with her tell her the truth.

**Providing opinions to the SSAO**. The fact that the "Assistant to's" in this study are frequently a sounding board and/or confidante for staff and the SSAO puts them in a position where their opinions may be sought out by the SSAO or offered to them unsolicited. Many of the participants discussed the role they play in providing their opinion to their vice president. In some instances they explicitly stated that their vice president sought out their opinion and other instances they indicated that they provided their opinion or perspective, but it was not clear whether they were explicitly asked to do so. As noted earlier in this chapter, when some participants discussed the Courage to Challenge, which includes providing feedback to their vice president, several discussed how they provide their opinion to their vice president as their way of challenging or providing feedback.

Several participants stated that their vice president sought out their opinion and explicitly asked them to share it. For example, when discussing her experience as an "Assistant to," Erica indicated that her vice president relies on her "heavily" for her opinion. She added that she serves as his "eyes and ears" within the student affairs division and knows that staff will say things to her that they will not say to him. When discussing her experience as an "Assistant to" and the Courage to Serve, Jennifer mentioned that her vice president asks her opinion on a regular basis. For example, she said:

> …our relationship isn't just I guess like a typical assistant/boss type thing where there's this like power dynamic—obviously there is, he's a VP—but he cares about what I think about things. So he'll ask me…when we hire someone new he asked me my opinion of who should be, who should supervise them….

Angela's opinion is also sought by her vice president who includes her in issues related to staff planning and related organizational matters. She notes that he is often "…asking for my opinion on these things."

For a few participants, they couched their role in providing opinions to their vice president as playing Devil's Advocate. For example, when discussing how she challenges her vice president, Michelle indicated that he will often ask her for her opinion. She indicated that when discussing issues she will often challenge and disagree with him. "…I challenge a lot of what he –or I disagree a lot I guess sometimes of what his beliefs are on some different situations so that is one way I think I play Devil's Advocate a lot." When discussing how she challenges her vice president, Vanessa preferred to characterize what she does as playing Devil's Advocate. "…I probably play Devil's Advocate a lot. I probably do a lot of 'What if and why' when we're having conversations about things that…she's brought up." She added that she is not afraid to ask her vice president to provide a rationale for her decisions: So I'm not afraid to say 'Well talk me through that, or what does that look like,' or you know, 'Why did you do that?'

For Maria, her ability to play the Devil's Advocate enabled her to contribute to her vice president's success. She also considers herself to be a sounding board for her vice president and they are able to go back and forth when discussing an issue. She notes that her vice president "…wants you to challenge him when you don't like his ideas or plans or if you think that we should be going in a different direction." Maria also mentioned that in addition to playing Devil's Advocate and serving as a sounding board, as part of her efforts to challenge her vice president, she may simply remind him of previous decisions that he has made, such as cutting the budget of a department in the past, when they are considering budgets for the coming year: "…hey did you—don't forget that department was cut two years ago when we were not in such, a you know, were in a different financial model."

**Sharing "intelligence" with the SSAO.** The analysis of the responses from the interviews seems to suggest that the relationship between the "Assistant to" and other staff facilitates their ability to gather "intelligence" or concerns or frustrations within the student affairs division or other parts of the institution. This was also discussed as part of findings related to the second research question as an example of a behavior that should be added to the Courage to Serve, and as part of the findings for the fourth research question as a way in which the "Assistant to" contributes to the success of their SSAO.

The "Assistant to" can serve as a conduit for sharing "intelligence" with the SSAO. For some participants, such as Erica, providing this type of information is something they see as a key aspect of their role. She discussed her role in providing "intelligence" at several points during her interview. For example, when discussing her experience as an "Assistant to" during the beginning of the interview, Erica indicated that her vice president relies on her for her opinion, specifically with regard to "…how things are going and things that people might say to me but not necessarily to him." When discussing what's challenging about her position she stated that distinguishing what information she should share with her vice president and what information should not be shared:

> …I don't want him to be caught off guard. So if I heard something that I think he's going to hear outside of our circle I'm going to tell him and let him know 'Hey this is coming up and just so you know this is what's going on and this is what I know.' Unless the person has specifically said 'This goes nowhere.'

When discussing how she contributes to the success of her vice president, Erica also highlighted her ability to keep him informed so that he is not surprised by anything that may come up in a meeting with senior leaders from other departments around the institution. When discussing how she contributes to managing conflicts as part of the Courage to Serve, Erica mentioned that staff will come to her to vent their frustrations. She will sometimes let the vice president know in case one of them should take action to address the situation.

While Erica mentioned her role in providing “intelligence” to her vice president on multiple occasions during the interview, other participants mentioned it, but in relation to specific questions. For example, when discussing her responsibilities Vanessa stated that one of them is keeping her vice president “in the loop” about the “word on the street” so that she’s knows what’s happening and what she should be concerned about. Michelle, when discussing her role in defending her vice president as part of the Courage to Serve mentioned how she shares what she hears from others with her vice president. “And then oftentimes those are the things that then I take back to him and say ‘Hey I hear people feel like this.’ And so bringing that information back to him, not in a way that’s aggressive or accusing, but more information sharing.” For Megan, sharing information with her vice president that she feels he needs to know about is how she demonstrates the Courage to Assume Responsibility. If it is something that needs to be addressed further, she or the vice president will do so:

> …If I know of some tension within the organization or within an office I feel like it’s my duty to bring that to my leader’s attention. And then they can address that as needed. And whether or not to, if we need to have a conversation with an individual we can do that, if he needs to do that he does that.

# CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

In this chapter I will discuss findings from the study in the context of its four research questions, themes and roles related to the work of the "Assistant to" that emerged during the data analysis process, as well as the importance of the study. I will also present a model depicting how the Courageous Follower model applies to the role of the "Assistant to" an SSAO. I will conclude the chapter by discussing the study's implications for practice, limitations, and suggestions for future research.

The overall purpose of this study was to explore the applicability of the Courageous Follower model to the role of the "Assistant to" in student affairs organizations. The higher education literature, particularly that which is devoted to student affairs, suggests that the "Assistant to" role is an emerging one within student affairs organizations (Tull & Rammell, 2012). At the same time there is dearth of research about these positions and the contribution that they may make to a student affairs organization. In order to learn more about this position and the work that those who hold this position do, the following research questions were used to guide the study:

1. Do Chaleff's five dimensions (and associated behaviors) of a Courageous Follower manifest themselves in the work of the "Assistant to" in student affairs organizations? If so, how?
2. Are there additional behaviors displayed by those in the "Assistant to" role that are not included in Chaleff's model?
3. In the opinion of the "Assistant to" in student affairs in what ways does their role contribute to the organizational effectiveness and goal achievement of their respective student affairs organization?

4. In the opinion of the "Assistant to" in student affairs in what ways do they contribute to the success of the SSAO for whom they work?

## Importance of the Study

This study is important in that it provides additional research on a group of staff that appears to be growing within student affairs organizations. At a time when there are fiscal constraints on higher education institutions and concerns about "administrative bloat" it is important to determine the value of positions such as the "Assistant to" (Belkin & Thurm, 2012). Additionally, there are increasing demands for accountability for higher education institutions, as discussed in Chapter Two, which also means that there is additional pressure on student affairs organizations to do their part to contribute to student success (Tull & Rammell, 2012). This study explored the extent to which staff in the "Assistant to" position contribute to the success of their respective organizations, as well as that of their SSAO.

The literature suggests there is a significant focus on the role of leaders, but not as much on the role of followers. For example, according to Beegle and Dixon (2006) there were 95,220 titles in an online bookstore devoted to leadership, but only 792 titles related to followers or followership. This study helps to draw attention to the role that followers can play in student affairs organizations specifically, and within higher education institutions and other organizations generally.

Additionally, this study provides an opportunity to explore the Courageous Follower model in the context of the specific position of the "Assistant to" the SSAO. In doing so the results can either reinforce the applicability of the model to various positions, or it can suggest areas for possible alterations. This study also adds to the discussion about the role of followers in the success of an organization, particularly within higher education and student affairs organizations.

## Findings

In the pages which follow I will discuss some of the findings as they relate to each research question.

### How the Courageous Follower Model Manifests in the Work of the "Assistant to" in Student Affairs

The simple answer to the question of how the Courageous Follower model applies to the role of the "Assistant to" in student affairs is, sometimes. As demonstrated in the preceding results chapter, the five dimensions of the Courageous Follower manifested to different degrees and in different ways in the work of the "Assistant to." As a reminder, for each of the Courageous Follower dimensions, participants were asked a question about the primary behavior of the dimension and a question about the secondary behavior(s). In some instances several behaviors were included in the second question. I interpreted the primary behavior based on Chaleff's (2009) discussion of each of the five dimensions described in his model and what he emphasized about each one. I determined the secondary behavior(s) based on how he discussed the other behaviors of each dimension.

Table 2

Demonstration of Specific Courageous Follower Behaviors

| | *N* |
|---|---|
| **Courage to Assume Responsibility** | |
| Assume responsibility or demonstrate initiative | 12 |
| Influence the culture | 9 |
| Engage in self-assessment | 8 |
| Engage in personal growth | 8 |
| Improve processes | 8 |
| **Courage to Serve** | |
| Discern when you can speak or act on behalf of your SSAO | 8 (12) |
| Serve as a gatekeeper | 11 |
| Defend the SSAO | 7 |
| Improve communication processes | 8 |
| Manage conflicts | 0 |
| **Courage to Challenge** | |
| Challenge or stand up to SSAO | 8 (11) |
| Offer feedback to SSAO | 9 (11) |
| **Courage to Participate in Transformation** | |
| Confront SSAO about a behavior | 6 |
| Model change for the SSAO | 11 (14) |
| **Courage to Take Moral Action** | |
| Raise concerns about violations of personal ethics | 3 |
| Consider resigning or reporting SSAO | 2 |

*Note:* The numbers above indicate the number of participants who stated that they exhibited a specific behavior and were able to provide a specific example of demonstrating the respective behavior. The number in parentheses indicates the number of participants who stated that they exhibited the specific behavior.

As noted in Table 2 above, generally speaking, almost all participants in the study were able to provide examples related to the primary behaviors of the Courage to Assume Responsibility, the Courage to Serve, and the Courage Challenge. However, as will be discussed later, many of the examples shared regarding the Courage to Challenge were not the kind of “challenges” that might negatively impact the relationship between the “Assistant to” and the SSAO. Most participants did not have examples to share related to the primary behaviors of the Courage to Participate in Transformation and the Courage to

Take Moral Action. Furthermore, within the Courage to Serve, the extent to which participants demonstrated the secondary behaviors was mixed. For example, most participants indicated that they served as a gatekeeper or had defended their SSAO, but none were involved directly in managing conflicts between their boss and other leaders. With regard to the Courage to Participate in Transformation, most (11 of 15) participants were able to provide examples of modeling change for their vice president. With regard to the Courage to Take Moral Action, most participants did not have experience with having to consider resigning or reporting their SSAO due to unethical behavior, although several identified situations that would prompt them to consider such actions. In the pages that follow, I will discuss the findings of each of the five dimensions of being a Courageous Follower.

**The Courage to Assume Responsibility**. Most participants were able to provide examples of how they demonstrated the primary behavior of the Courage to Assume Responsibility, demonstrating that they could take initiative and assume more responsibility within their organization. According to Chaleff (2009), the complaint that he hears from leaders most often is that they would like members of their organization to "…assume more responsibility for the organization and initiate ideas and action on their own" (p. 35). In Chaleff's view, the ability to take initiative is one of the ways of distinguishing a Courageous Follower from other followers. He adds that by doing so, followers can develop a true partnership with their leader, as well as a sense of community within their part of the organization, which maximizes the follower's contribution to the organization's common purpose.

There were many examples of participants identifying problems within their organizations and either acting on them, or bringing them to the attention of their SSAO. For some participants their actions related to areas of their responsibility, which coincides with Chaleff's (2009) assertion that Courageous Followers "assume responsibility for events in their vicinity" (p. 49). I interpret this to mean within areas of an individual's responsibility. However, several participants provided examples of taking initiative that were outside of the scope of their position. In some ways these examples are a better demonstration of their commitment to the success of their organization because they were willing to address problems or issues that exceeded the scope of their responsibility. In some instances the initiative demonstrated by the participant resulted in a new job responsibility for them. In other instances the primary outcome was that it advanced the work of their student affairs division, which aligns with Chaleff's assertion that Courageous followers support the organization's "common purpose."

The secondary behaviors of the Courage to Assume Responsibility explored to what extent participants were able to demonstrate the ability to engage in self-assessment and personal growth, influence the culture of the organization and improve processes. In all instances at least eight participants were able to provide specific examples of these behaviors.

Chaleff asserts that Courageous Followers learn to "encourage honest feedback." With regard to engaging in self-assessment or personal growth, a number of participants indicated that they were not only open to feedback from others, but were able to provide examples of how they have sought it out and acted on the feedback received. For many participants they were able to offer examples that demonstrated how they engaged in personal growth, such as going to conferences and intentionally staying current with higher education literature. The examples that participants were able to provide related to improving processes and influencing the culture indicate that while some of the "Assistant to's" seem to play this role, it is not a core aspect of how they carry out their responsibilities. For some individuals, the examples of influencing the culture seemed to be provided as a way of responding to the question asked, rather than an example of something that they intentionally tried to do within their organization to influence its culture.

Reflecting on my own experience as a student affairs professional, who has worked in a similar role for several SSAO, the findings make sense to me. Several participants mentioned that they are a "utility player" within their organization. It stands to reason that individuals who work in these types of roles would seek opportunities to make a difference within their organizations by identifying problems and seeking to solve them. Because of the nature of their positions there is more freedom for them to demonstrate this type of initiative then those who may serve as directors or senior leaders within their organization who have a defined set of responsibilities and area of focus. This aspect of the role of the "Assistant to" is similar to that of the *freelancer* described by Stringer (1977) in his study of "Assistants to" in higher education. As noted in Chapter Two, Stringer described the *freelancer* as an individual who is a generalist and who can transcend organizational boundaries and have degrees of freedom with regard to how to complete their work.

Many of the participants discussed wanting to advance within the field of student affairs, including a few who desire to be an SSAO. That ambition may drive many to seek ways to build their resume and add experiences that will assist them to advance in the profession. Given the nature of their role and the proximity to the SSAO, being viewed as someone who can identify and tackle issues without being asked to do so within an organization can result in the SSAO adding additional duties to their responsibilities. It also increases the chance that the SSAO would support their efforts to seek a higher position within the student affairs organization where the “Assistant to” works, elsewhere within the organization, or at another institution. As mentioned in Chapter Two, Kelley (1992) discussed what motivates people to become followers. For some they are guided by a desire to express themselves, which can manifest as using their skills to contribute to the success of an organization. Those “Assistant to’s” who demonstrate the Courage to Assume Responsibility demonstrate a similar motivation.

Kelley (1993) identifies seven Paths to Followership, also noted in Chapter Two. While I did not directly ask all participants what led them to take their current position as an “Assistant to,” I do have a sense of which of Kelley’s Paths to Followership led most of them to their role. Most of the participants seem to demonstrate that they would be an “Apparentice.” According to Kelley, the Apprentice is a path to followership that is chosen by those who aspire to be leaders. Those who follow this path, understand that they have to “learn the ropes” in order to advance. Most of the participants indicated that they desired to advance within higher education broadly, or student affairs particularly. Several particpants commented that their position provided a great opportunity to learn, particularly due to their ability to work closely with senior leaders within student affairs.

With regard to engaging in self-assessment and personal growth, this is very common within the student affairs field. Professional development within the student affairs profession is seen as a necessity. Komives and Carpenter (2009) note that "…today's times require that [student affairs] professionals acquire new information to approach contemporary challenges" (p. 371). As noted by Barr, Desler, and Associates (2000),

> When it comes to professional development, student affairs administrators have responsibilities to self as well as their staff. Professional development activities can help keep student affairs staff up-to-date on new theory, research and good practices and they can provide training in areas of deficiency (p.476).

Professional associations within student affairs, which exist in part to provide professional development have existed as far back as 1910 (Nuss, 2000). There are annual conferences that staff within student affairs can attend, in addition to a plethora of online professional development webinars in which staff can partake. It is not uncommon for the two primary annual student affairs conferences (ACPA and NAPSA) to attract between 3,000 and 4,000 attendees each. Within this context, it is not surprising that many of the participants indicated engaging in professional development activities as a way of attending to their personal growth.

Self-assessment is embedded within student affairs practice, as demonstrated by recent professional competencies that were developed jointly by ACPA and NASPA. For example, as part of the "Leadership" competency, student affairs professionals should "Identify one's strengths and weaknesses as a leader, and seek opportunities to develop one's leadership skills" (American College Personnel Association, 2010, p. 22). As part of the "Personal Foundations" competency, student affairs professionals are advised to "…identify one's primary work responsibilities and, with appropriate ongoing feedback, craft a realistic, summative self-appraisal of one's strengths and limitations" (p. 24). Therefore it is not surprising that so many participants were able to provide examples of engaging in self-assessment. Additionally, since many of the participants were identified because they have participated in NASPA, some may be predisposed to focusing on their professional development.

**Courage to Serve**. The exploration of the Courage to Serve revealed that some "Assistant to's" have a nuanced view of the work that they do and the language used in the model and the interview questions may not adequately reflect that nuance. The primary behavior of the Courage to Serve explored in the study is the ability of followers to determine when it is appropriate to speak for or act on behalf of their leader and when they should consult with the leader first. Chaleff (2009) stated that he was amazed at the number of decisions a "good" chief of staff for a U.S. senator makes without consulting with their boss. According to Chaleff, the ability to do this is "…the epitome of judgment in serving a leader" (p. 57). He goes on to say that "If you bother leaders with too many matters, you will squander their energy; if you fail to bring things that they need to know to their attention, you may blindside them, causing embarrassment or calamity" (p. 57). With regard to the secondary behaviors of the Courage to Serve participants were asked about their experience including serving as a gatekeeper, defending their vice president, improving communication, and helping to manage conflicts between their vice president and other leaders. The participants demonstrated these behaviors to varying degrees.

***Acting or speaking on behalf of the SSAO***. Participants were asked to explain how they discern when they can speak or act on behalf of their vice president and when they need to consult. Most participants indicated that they had demonstrated this behavior and most of those were able to provide specific examples indicating how they determine when they need to consult before speaking or acting. This means that most of the "Assistant to's" in the study were able to assess a situation and determine whether it was something that they could address without involving their SSAO. The ability to do this can make an organization more efficient because it does not require the SSAO to weigh in on every issue that may be presented to them, in the absence of someone like an "Assistant to."

***Serving as a gatekeeper*.** Most participants indicated that they played the role of a gatekeeper for the SSAO. As was noted in the results in Chapter Four, this role is a key way that the "Assistant to" contributes to the success of their SSAO. For three participants this role was part of their official duties given their job responsibilities, but for most participants it was not. Playing the gatekeeper manifested itself in different ways among the participants. Some described being almost literal gatekeepers in that they played a role in preventing people from meeting with the SSAO without an appointment, in part because of their physical location near the vice president's office. Some discussed gatekeeping with regard to their role in scheduling meetings or overseeing their vice president's schedule. Some discussed gatekeeping as a form of triage in which they intentionally tried to address issues by meeting with people so that their vice president did not have to do so. Two participants indicated that their vice president deployed them as gatekeepers by requesting that they meet with specific individuals.

According to Chaleff (2009) a Courageous Follower helps to conserve the energy of the leader, and serving as a gatekeeper enables them to do that. As noted in Chapter Two, the literature suggests that the role of the SSAO has become more complex (Dungy

& Ellis, 2011; Tull & Kuk, 2012). It stands to reason that with this complexity comes increased demands on the SSAO's time. Chaleff also noted that an effective follower must "…establish a process to insulate an in-demand leader from excessive pressure and help her make balanced choices about which invitations to access, delegate, or decline" (p. 63). The process should result in a schedule that reflects a leader's values and priorities. During the interviews none of the participants indicated that there was an intentional process or guidelines which facilitated their gatekeeping efforts.

Regardless of the type of gatekeeper the "Assistant to" was, the end result was the same—it allowed the SSAOs to focus their attention on other matters. As many said, being a gatekeeper "kept things off of the plate" of their vice president. While the "Assistant to" may have kept things off the vice president's plate, it does not mean that they did not treat the individuals or concerns with care, or provide meaningful assistance. Several participants indicated their role as a gatekeeper enabled the vice president's office to show concern about an issue, without actually having to involve the vice president. In these instances the "Assistant to" helped to redirect those who believe that the only way to address their concern is to speak to the SSAO. Gatekeepers, according to Chaleff (2009)

> …need to guard against becoming arrogant and indifferent to the needs of those seeking access to the leader. If supporting a leader requires blocking or limiting access….a gatekeeper can do so with empathy and find other ways to help the person seeking access (p. 63).

His assertions were supported by some of the examples provided by the participants in the study.

One surprising result from the findings is the number of participants who mentioned the role that proximity, either to the SSAO or support staff played in their ability to serve as an effective gatekeeper. Although intuitively it makes sense to have the "Assistant to" located close to the SSAO, it might not make the same intuitive sense to have them physically close to other staff who are the first line of defense between a person who wants to meet with or talk to the vice president and the vice president. Having an "Assistant to" physically located next to these individuals puts them in "hearing distance" of front-line staff and may enable them to intervene when needed because they can hear requests to meet with the vice president when someone comes into the office or when someone makes such a request over the telephone.

***Defending the SSAO***. When discussing the extent to which participants defended their vice president as part of the Courage to Serve, a nuanced view of what it means to defend emerged. For some participants, they readily had examples of defending their vice president and/or decisions that they made. For others, the term defending did not seem to fit. The way in which they described their efforts, which included "explaining", "providing rationale" and "providing context" gave additional insight into the role that the "Assistant to" can play in helping to build support and understanding for decisions made by the vice president. The nuance provided by several of the participants regarding how they "defend" their SSAO is aligned with Whisler's (1956) work that explored the "Assistant to" in corporate settings. Whisler noted that one of the primary roles of these individuals was interpreting their boss for those who work below them. He listed three primary functions based on this research and second one was "to interpret the boss to others below him [sic]—especially those several layers below him [sic]..." (p. 275). He added that "Those most likely to be treated to an interpretation of executive actions and directives are managers several levels below the executive rather than his immediate subordinates" (pp. 275-276). Whisler's findings are reinforced by many of the participants who discussed having to explain or interpret decisions made by their boss to others.

Very often communications about decisions are focused on a broad audience and are succinct. As a result it is difficult to provide the detail or background needed to gain support of staff throughout the organization who may not understand why they decision was made. The role that the "Assistant to" plays in "defending" their vice president helps to provide background regarding decisions, which can increase the extent to which the decisions are supported. In addition, many participants discussed the trust that exists between them and others within the organization. As a result of this trust, an "Assistant to" is more likely to be listened to when they are telling their peers within the organization that a decision made by the SSAO was a sound one.

***Improving communications***. Several participants were able to provide examples of improving communication processes within their student affairs organization. Chaleff (2009) views communication processes as one of the most important parts of an organization's structure. According to him, followers who serve a leader well are those who help identify deficiencies in communication processes and help design a collection of communication vehicles to meet the needs of the organization. For many of the study's participants, communications was a primary role of their position, while for others it was not. As noted in results in Chapter Four, six of the 13 participants who provided job descriptions had communications as a primary part of their responsibilities. In Chapter Two, when reviewing existing research on the role of the "Assistant to" in student affairs, the study by Mallory, Castillo Clark, and Shulz (2012) was presented, which found that

56% of the job descriptions that they reviewed for “Assistant to” had communications as a job responsibility. Their findings are similar to those in this study. Although most of the examples of improving communication were provided by those who had communications as part of their job responsibilities, there were some examples provided by others. Their willingness to address areas that were outside of their formal responsibilities provides another example of the Courage to Assume Responsibility.

Based on my own experience, the ability of student affairs organizations to effectively communicate with external audiences, including students and faculty, is important. It is through this external communication that individuals, such as faculty and students, become aware of relevant programs, services and issues (e.g., mental health resources, career assistance, leadership development opportunities). Effective internal communication processes increases the chances that staff at all levels are adequately informed about the organization’s direction, initiatives, challenges, successes, etc. This information in turn helps them to be better able to perform their job, to advocate on behalf of the division both internally and externally.

***Managing conflicts***. When discussing the extent to which they played a role in resolving conflicts, none of the participants indicated that they played a direct role. However, several indicated that they played an indirect role, mostly by serving as a confidante or sounding board for their vice president. In addition to being a person that their SSAO could vent to about an issue with another leader, a few indicated that they provided advice on how to address a situation of concern. Their role as a sounding board provides an opportunity for suggesting a course of action that might not be suggested were it not for the presence of a conflict between the vice president and another leader.

Many participants expressed surprise when they were asked about their role in resolving conflicts between their vice president and other leaders. The implication was that it was not an appropriate role for them to play. One participant, Kerry, articulated a concern about how becoming involved with conflicts between the vice president and others would impact her own credibility. Although Kerry was the only person to specifically mention the credibility issue in this context, based on my own experience I think it is an important point. Although it was not specifically explored in this study, it is important that an "Assistant to" has credibility with those with whom they have to work. That credibility enables them to do their job, in part because it engenders trust in their judgement.

**The Courage to Challenge**. The primary behavior of the Courage to Challenge that was explored was whether the participant had challenged or stood up to their SSAO. Eleven indicated that they had challenged or stood up to their vice president, and eight were able to provide specific examples. Those examples included challenging the format of events organized by the division, programming offered by the division, and personnel decisions of the SSAO. Chaleff (2009) states that "followers who provide robust support for leaders are in a strong position to challenge their actions that threaten the common purpose" (p. 85). In my opinion none of the examples of challenges were the type of situations where the organization's "common purpose" was being threatened. Nor were they situations where the "Assistant to" might have been hesitant to speak up about a concern.

It is possible that participants opted to not share other examples of challenging their boss because they did not wish to appear to be highlighting potentially poor decisions made by their vice president. Another possible explanation is that participants in practice do not regularly challenge or stand up to their vice presidents as they do their work as an "Assistant to". As mentioned before, several of the participants indicated a desire to advance within the student affairs profession, including four who wished to become an SSAO. A challenge to a decision that was not welcomed could result in a less than supportive reference, or even intentional efforts to prevent someone from being hired for another position.

Results in Chapter Four identified several participants who discussed challenging their vice president by playing "Devil's Advocate" or by providing their opinion or another perspective to their vice president. This nuanced view of challenging may be an accurate reflection of how staff who work in these roles try to change the mind of their vice president. In practice, challenging and standing up to someone, like you might do to a colleague or someone who had less power than you, may not be an effective strategy for two people who work as closely together as a vice president and someone in the "Assistant to" role.

The ability to provide feedback to a leader about their behavior was the secondary behavior of the Courage to Challenge that was explored. Although eleven participants indicated that they demonstrated this behavior, only nine were able to provide specific examples of providing feedback to their vice president. Nine examples related to behaviors that impacted staff negatively, such as swearing, not seeming to be invested sufficiently in the work performed by staff, and not adequately recognizing significant staff achievements. Chaleff (2009) highlights challenging the use of language during his discussion of the Courage to Challenge:

> Courageous followers are alert to the language of leaders as well as to their deeds…The use of derogatory terms to describe groups of people or individuals dehumanizes them and establishes the climate for abusive actions (p. 101).

Chaleff goes on to say that "…when leaders use euphemisms such as *collateral damage, relocation centers* or *downsizing*, we should challenge them to explore their underlying discomfort with a subject" (p. 101). Chaleff asserts that "It requires as much courage to confront a leader about language as about behavior; it is easy for the leader to ridicule our concern and claim the words were 'unimportant' or 'harmless. They are not" (p. 101). Although his examples are not similar to the examples of language that some of the participants challenged, the language was considered to be problematic by the "Assistant to" (i.e., cursing) and possibly others within the organization.

Although participants were willing to provide feedback to their SSAO on their behavior, it was not clear of the impact of their feedback. As Chaleff (2009) notes "It is not appropriate or realistic to expect leaders to accept every piece of feedback and immediately make changes" (p. 92). Their reaction may depend on many factors, including the timing of the feedback, and whether they think it is accurate.

The fact that the "Assistant to's" were willing to provide feedback to their vice presidents regarding these behaviors highlights the role that they play in advocating for staff. Given their position, those in the "Assistant to" role have access to and a relationship with the SSAO that other staff do not. As noted in Chapter Four many staff confide in the "Assistant to," or share information with them about concerns or issues that they do not wish to share with the vice president directly. As a result, it is not surprising that most of the examples of providing feedback to the SSAO about their behavior involved behaviors that had a negative impact on staff.

Several of the examples of feedback to the SSAO involved work-life balance issues. A few participants discussed talking to their vice president about the need to not work so much, or the need to refrain from sending emails late in the evening or when away from the office. In some instances the concern about this behavior was driven by the impact it would have on other staff, but in at least one instance the "Assistant to" indicated that she was concerned about the impact that it would have on her and her ability to demonstrate an effective work-life balance. As noted previously as part of the discussion of the Courage to Serve, a Courageous Follower plays a role in conserving the energy of their leader. By encouraging their vice president to not work so hard and so late, they are making an effort to preserve their energy, in addition to looking out for their colleagues and their own self- interest. They are also demonstrating a concern for the common purpose of the organization which can be impacted if staff, including the SSAO and others, become overworked.

**The Courage to Participate in Transformation**. The primary behavior of the Courage to Participate in Transformation explored is whether a person had helped their boss change a behavior that might threaten the ability of the organization to meet its mission (Chaleff, 2009). Most participants stated that they had not done this. Only six of the participants shared examples in response to the question asked to assess the primary behavior of this Courageous follower behavior, but only one may have risen to the level of changing a behavior that threatened the organization's ability to carry out its mission. The one example related to an "Assistant to" who encouraged their SSAO to use the services of an executive coach so that they could have a better working relationship with other senior administrators. However, based on the information provided during the interview it was not clear if the SSAO was exhibiting behaviors that were problematic. The example does demonstrate an "Assistant to's" willingness to help their SSAO address a behavior and support them in the process of making changes. The other examples did not rise to the level of threating the ability of the organization's ability to carry out its mission. Additionally, other than raising an issue with their SSAO the participants did not indicate how they supported the leader during the process of changing or addressing the behavior of concern, which is a part of the Courage to Participate in Transformation.

It is possible that the "Assistant to's" were not presented with opportunities to help their SSAO transform a behavior that might threaten the organization. Unfortunately, I did not attempt to assess to what extent the participants would hypothetically attempt to help their leader transform in situations where transformation was warranted. It is also possible that participants were not willing to share examples of situations that might portray their SSAO in a bad light, particularly if the area of transformation was related to a personal problem (e.g., alcoholism).

The secondary behavior of the Courage to Participate in Transformation explored was the extent to which participants modeled the ability to change for their SSAO by engaging in personal change efforts. Most participants were able to provide examples of doing so, although it was not always clear whether the vice president was aware of their efforts to change. Nonetheless the examples demonstrated a willingness of the "Assistant to" to model change by making changes in their behaviors or practices in order to enhance their ability to do their job and/or respond to concerns that were brought to their attention.

Given the nature of the "Assistant to" position there may be a few reasons why so many participants were able to provide examples of modeling change. As was mentioned earlier in this chapter, the student affairs profession puts a great deal of emphasis on professional development and growth. Therefore it is not surprising that the "Assistant to's" in this study would be able to cite examples of changing their behavior. Additionally, as noted earlier, many were able to provide examples of engaging in self-assessment and attending to their personal growth, which can help set the stage for their ability to model change.

Another reason why so many participants may have had examples of modeling change for their SSAO is that doing so is in their self-interest. Due to the close working relationship that many "Assistant to's" have with their vice president, it is in their best interest to be seen as willing to make changes that improves their ability to perform, as well as demonstrate their ability to respond to constructive criticism. Doing so may help to improve their stature with their SSAO which can be helpful with regard to future advancement opportunities within the division, as well as having the support of the vice president when seeking employment elsewhere. In addition, many of the participants indicated a desire to advance within their profession. Having the ability to change their behavior may make them a better employee and may increase their ability to succeed in their profession, even if their efforts are not recognized or acknowledged by their vice president.

**The Courage to Take Moral Action**. In some ways the Courage to Take Moral Action is the most courageous dimension in Chaleff's model because it requires a follower to confront a leader about concerns that their principles or values are being violated. In serious situations it may require that a follower consider resigning their position or reporting their leader to a higher authority. The vast majority of the participants indicated that they did not have an example of having to confront their SSAO about actions that conflicted with their own principles or values, which is the primary behavior of Courage to Take Moral Action. Results in Chapter Four indicated that many responded in a way that indicated that they were glad to not have had such an experience. Three individuals provided responses and only one related to behaviors exhibited by their current vice president which violated their principles or values. In this instance the SSAO had a habit of implying that those who took time off from work were not working hard enough, which conflicted with the participant's desire to spend time with friends and family.

There are multiple possible explanations for why so few participants were able to share an example in response to the question posed. The simplest one being that they have not experienced such a situation during their work as an "Assistant to." This is a reasonable possibility for several reasons. Although this behavior of the Courage to Take Moral Actions focuses not so much on unethical behavior, but on behavior that violates the values and principles of the "Assistant to," I will assume that for most individuals, those values would include basic ethical principles. Therefore it is appropriate to consider to what extent there is a likelihood of unethical behavior being exhibited by an SSAO.

While it can be said for many professions, the student affairs profession places a high level of importance on ethical behavior. Kitchener (1985) (as cited in Fried, 2000) developed a set of five ethical principles that are used widely within student affairs. These principles include "Do no harm," and "Be trustworthy." Several student affairs professional organizations, such as ACPA, have articulated the ethical practices that should be displayed by those who work in the profession (Fried). Student affairs organizations are often considered the conscience of an institution and they have a significant role in holding students accountable for their behavior through oversight of student judicial processes.

It would stand to reason that the person who is hired to oversee a student affairs organization would act in an ethical manner. That is not to say that there are not unethical leaders of student affairs organizations, but they may be rarer than in other large organizations. In a related fashion, student affairs is a values-based profession where divisions of student affairs often articulate the values that guide their work. Individuals within student affairs organizations, particularly SSAO, are also guided by their personal values. A few participants mentioned the fact that their SSAO was values-driven or had great integrity when indicating that they did not have an example to share regarding concerns that their values or principles were being violated.

Another possible explanation is that participants may have been reluctant to share an example that might potentially paint their SSAO in a poor light. Although participants were assured that their anonymity and that of their SSAO would be protected, some may have been hesitant to share an example of a time when they had to confront their vice president because of concerns about violations of their values or principles. Although the intent of this research study was to explore the Courageous Follower model as it relates to the "Assistant to" in their current employment situation, in retrospect it might have been instructive to ask if they had experienced such situations in previous employment situations and how they reacted. That might have provided them with an opportunity to share an example that would be difficult to connect to a specific person.

The secondary behavior of the Courage to Take Moral Action that was explored was whether participants had to contend with situations where they considered resigning or reporting their SSAO to a higher authority because of something they did. Not surprisingly, almost none of the participants had an example to share. One shared an example of an issue that they were concerned enough about to talk to their SSAO about, but they did not consider resigning or reporting them as a result of their concern. Another shared an example of choosing not to follow a previous employer to a new role after they were promoted to a senior leadership position because of allegations regarding unethical behavior engaged in by the newly promoted senior leader. It is not clear if they would have continued to work for this person if they had not been promoted.

Although most participants did not provide examples related to the question asked, several did indicate the types of situations that would cause them to consider acting. These situations included mistreatment of others, illegal activities, or behavior that placed the institution, the division or individuals at risk. This demonstrates that at least for some of the participants they would be willing to consider reporting their SSAO or resigning if the circumstances required them to do so.

There were some participants who made statements indicating that they might not be so willing to take action regarding behavior engaged in by their SSAO that violated their personal ethics. For example, one participant mentioned that you have to "choose your battles" when responding to this question. Another stated that she saw herself being at the institution where they worked for a long time and said that they would "outlast" a boss whose behavior concerned her. Another said that they would "take a lot of crap" before considering leaving. These sentiments speak to part of the reason why the Courage to Take Moral Action was changed from its initial title, the Courage to Leave. As noted in Chapter Three, Dixon (2003) discovered that the way followers reacted to ethical situations involving their leader was more complex than whether or not they leave their organization since there are several factors that make it difficult for someone to leave a position.

One of the participants, Maria, suggested an interesting explanation for why there was not an abundance of responses from participants indicating that they had to consider whether to take moral action. In her opinion, the nature of the relationship between the SSAO and the "Assistant to" is such that they need to be in sync with each other. The "Assistant to" needs to support the work of the SSAO and advocate to others on their behalf. If the "Assistant to" became aware that they were not in sync with the vice president because of differing values, their approach to ethics, etc., Maria asserts that the "Assistant to" would likely leave that position. If her assertion is accurate it would be difficult to find current "Assistant to's" who have had these experiences with a current employer.

**Additional Courageous Follower Behaviors Demonstrated by "Assistant to's"**

Results described in Chapter Four suggested a small amount of consensus regarding the possible addition of the Courage to Be Humble to the Courageous Follower model. During the interview process several of the participants suggested behaviors that in my opinion relate to the idea of being humble both when identifying possible additions to the model and while describing how they do their work. For example, Kerry suggested that an “Assistant to” needed to have humility in order to demonstrate what she called the Courage to Be Wrong. Mary suggested that an “Assistant to” needed to be able to understand that “…it’s not about you”, and know when they should share their opinion and when they should not. Monique said that the “Assistant to” needed to be able to “check your ego at the door” and Lisa said that an “Assistant to” needed to know how to “keep their ego in check.” These behaviors as described by the participants seem to all relate to the idea of being humble and not being focused on themselves. Many of the participants mentioned that they wanted their vice president to succeed and/or that they wanted their division of student affairs to succeed. In order to accomplish this goal their focus cannot be on themselves, but on helping their vice president and/or their division of student affairs. By and large the participants seemed focused on doing their job to the best of their ability in order to contribute to the success of their vice president and/or the organization. Several mentioned that they liked being behind the scenes.

Specific behaviors that could be part of the proposed Courage to Be Humble might include not being in competition with your SSAO and others in the organization, articulating an explicit desire for the SSAO to succeed, having the ability to discern when it is appropriate to share your opinion and it is not, being willing to not receive public acknowledgement for some of the work that you do, and being willing to admit when you are wrong and/or that you do not know something. The last behavior is currently addressed somewhat in the Courage to Serve, but perhaps it should be integrated into the proposed Courage to be Humble.

In addition to the possible addition of the Courage to Be Humble to the Courageous Follower model, as it applies to staff in the “Assistant to” position, there is evidence to support adding additional behaviors to the Courage to Serve and the Courage to Challenge. As mentioned in Chapter Four, participants discussed or displayed several behaviors that are not specially mentioned as part of the existing model. These behaviors include serving as a confidante for a leader; the ability to gather information about the operations of the organization; building relationships which benefit the organization; serving as a conduit for information from staff inside the organization and elsewhere about issues and concerns, and sharing them with the SSAO.

The first three behaviors above are aligned with other behaviors of the Courage to Serve as articulated by Chaleff (2009). For example he discusses the importance of a follower establishing a relationship with their leader. He also discusses the role of a follower in sharing information from a leader with others. Stating that the follower should also share information from others with the leader is a natural corollary. The fourth behavior should be added to the Courage to Challenge. Chaleff's model currently includes providing feedback and input to a leader, and providing them with information about the concerns others within the organization seems to be a particular source of feedback and input that should be explicitly articulated.

**Contributions to Organizational Effectiveness and Goal Achievement**

For many participants their primary way of contributing to the success of their student affairs organization was by being responsible for core operational functions for the division, such as budgeting, communications, assessment, and technology. This finding is aligned with previous research cited in Chapter Two which discussed the emergence of the "Assistant to" and other cross-organizational specialist roles (Tull & Kuk, 2012). These positions can take responsibility for key functions on behalf of the entire division of student affairs, which can be more efficient and cost effective than having these roles duplicated in multiple places within the organization. The ability to have someone within the vice president's office who can attend to these tasks helps to ensure that there will be a more consistent approach within the division, and that what's done with regard to these core areas is aligned with the goals and vision of the SSAO. In addition, many of the participants were responsible for multiple centralized functions, which again may be more efficient and cost effective, particularly in times of budget challenges for public institutions. It is important to note that in some instances the "Assistant to" may doing the work that could be reasonably done by multiple individuals, as one participant noted during the interview process.

Another key way that the "Assistant to" contributes to the success of the student affairs organization was their ability to provide a comprehensive view of the organization. Other than the vice president and perhaps a few other staff within the central office, the "Assistant to" is typically the only senior staff member who does not have responsibilities for units within the student affairs division. It is very easy and common for directors of units, as well as assistant or associate vice presidents who may oversee several units, to become siloed in their thinking and perspective, and not adequately consider other parts of the student affairs division to the extent that they should. Their level of awareness about issues, needs, etc. related to the entire division may be limited by their necessary focus on their part of the student affairs organization.

The "Assistant to" is in a position to be knowledgeable about the entire division due to their regular work with directors as well as other staff. Additionally, when they are members of the senior leadership team they can contribute a perspective that does not favor specific units because they have a more broad perspective. This broad perspective also impacts how they work with individual units. The “Assistant to” can serve as a constant reminder of the need for programs and services offered in the various units to contribute to a larger student affairs mission and goals and to focus on outcomes that are important to the SSAO. Several participants highlighted the role they play in this respect during the interview process.

**Contributions to the Success of the SSAO**

Participants identified several ways that they contribute to the success of their vice president. Their ability to help their vice president by “taking things off their plate” is not unexpected. The nature of their role requires them to be ready to handle assignments that are given to them by the vice president, it also requires that they be able to determine when they can address an issue so that their SSAO does not have to. As noted in Chapter Two in a study regarding those who served as an “Assistant to” for college presidents, part of their role was to attend to tasks that were important to the president, but for which they did have time (Giddens, 1971). Additionally, Tull and Kuk (2012) highlight the role that the “Assistant to” plays in assisting their vice president to do their job as a result of the increasing complexity of the SSAO position. In Chapter Two I discussed some of the changes regarding the role of the SSAO. These changes include overseeing a complex set of units with diverse funding streams (student fees, earned revenue, general appropriations, private support), and unique needs (e.g., facility renovation).

The “Assistant to’s” ability to take things off of the vice president’s plate emerged at various points during the interview, but most notably as part of the Courage to Serve in the context of being a gatekeeper. And within the context of speaking for an acting on behalf of the SSAO. For example, as a gatekeeper, the “Assistant to” regularly meets with individuals or handle issues that could go to the vice president, but do not need to be handled by them. They also occasionally represent the vice president at various events and functions. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the gatekeeping function of the “Assistant to” is a valuable one as it allows the SSAO to focus on other priorities and use their time to address issues that cannot be addressed by others within the organization.

The “Assistant to” also displays the ability to take things off of the vice president’s plate by their ability to demonstrate the Courage to Assume Responsibility. As noted in Chapter Four, many participants were able to cite examples of identifying issues that needed to be addressed within the student affairs division and taking it upon themselves to address them. One participant spoke of how she evolved over time from merely raising issues with her vice president to raising the issue and telling them how they would take care of the issue. The ability of her and other “Assistant to’s” to do this is very helpful for SSAO. It gives them confidence to know that problems and issues that are important, but may not need their direct attention, are being addressed and they can focus their energies elsewhere.

A number of participants highlighted the role they play as a confidante or sounding board for their vice president. This role was mentioned at various parts during the interviews by many participants. This role is important because it enables the vice president to have someone who they can trust, be honest with, and who understands the issues and personalities that they are contending with as they lead their student affairs organization. Having someone who a leader can confide in and use as a sounding board assists with decision-making and problem solving. As pointed out by several participants, it also assists with the ability to manage conflicts with others, because there is someone that the SSAO can discuss the conflict with.

Many participants highlighted the role they play providing information to their vice president. This includes those who discussed gathering information about operations within the division, as well as those who discussed sharing information about concerns that they have obtained from others within the organization or elsewhere at the institution. The “Assistant to,” in part due to their relationships with others within student affairs and at the institution, is privy to information that may not be shared with the SSAO. Several participants mentioned that staff would share concerns with them that did not want to share with the SSAO or they did not want to share it with the SSAO themselves. The “Assistant to” is able to share these concerns with the SSAO and in doing so helps the SSAO to have a better understanding of the organization, how their decisions are being interpreted, as well as issues that may impact the ability of the organization to succeed.

The SSAO cannot be everywhere and the “Assistant to” can serve as their “eyes and ears” within the organization. This ability to provide information about staff concerns, reactions, etc. can also help with decision-making, as well as prevent morale issues from festering and negatively impacting the organization. This role is aligned with Whisler’s (1956) findings. He notes that an important function of the “Assistant to” is to “…initiate a flow of information about organization needs to executive that he [sic] would otherwise not receive” (p. 275).

**Importance of Relationships**

Now that I have discussed the findings related to the four research questions, I will discuss the primary theme that emerged from the data analysis—the importance of relationships. There were several sub-themes which emerged from the data, as well as roles played by the "Assistant to" and they have been discussed sufficiently in this chapter.

The primary and most important theme which emerged, in my opinion, is the role that relationships play in the work of the "Assistant to." Chaleff (2009) discusses the role of relationships in being a Courageous Follower briefly at the end of the chapter on the Courage to Serve. Chaleff wrote "….the follower's potential for influencing a leader will depend on the quality of relationship that has been developed between them" (p. 81). He noted that building a relationship is a strategic action yet, "…relationships are not the result of strategic maneuvering; they are born and grow through genuine concern for others and through cumulative experience that develops mutual appreciation and trust" (p. 81).

Many of the participants highlighted the role that their relationship with their SSAO played in their work as an "Assistant to." After the first few interviews, a question about relationships was typically asked during the interview because several participants referred to their relationships when answering various questions. Although the initial participants were not specifically asked about how their relationship with their SSAO developed, it seems that the experience that most participants had in developing a relationship with their vice president aligns with Chaleff's comments above. None of them gave the impression that they set out intentionally to build a good relationship with their vice president. The relationship evolved over time and manifested itself in various ways, including receiving additional work, having conversations about personal matters, feeling that the SSAO was invested in their success, and sharing confidential information.

During the course of the interviews, participants mentioned their relationships in different contexts. It seems that having a good relationship with the SSAO facilitates being a Courageous Follower. For example, those who have good relationships with their SSAO may be more willing to speak for them in their absence because they know how their vice president thinks and they know that their vice president trusts their judgment. Having a good relationship with the vice president also facilitates the follower's ability to challenge them or to give them feedback on their behavior. If there is a situation where a follower needs to discuss the violations of their personal values or principles with their SSAO, such a conversation is easier if there is a good relationship in place. The ability for an "Assistant to" to notice a problem within their student affairs division and take the initiative to present their vice president with a plan for solving it is facilitated by having a good relationship. The ability for an "Assistant to" to talk to their vice president about a behavior that threatens the future of the organization to carry out its mission and to be willing to help their vice president make the necessary changes is facilitated by having a good relationship. While not every participant demonstrated all of the characteristics of a Courageous Follower, more often than not, those that did were the ones who indicated that they had a good relationship with their vice president.

While Chaleff (2009) discussed the importance of relationships between the follower and their leader, he did not mention relationships between the follower and others in the organization. The importance of these relationships emerged as well as a theme during the data analysis process. Several participants mentioned how their relationships with others within their student affairs organization or elsewhere within the institution facilitated their work. Such relationships help with everything from being able to find space for a meeting on short notice, to being able to gather information about how an initiative within student affairs is being viewed by those outside of the division. This finding aligns with Stringer's (1977) exploration of "Assistant to's" in higher education organizations. He found that one type of "Assistant to," *the freelancer,* is likely to be on a first name basis with other leaders within the institution. They are also likely to be more visible on campus and are frequently contacted by others within the institution regarding their leader. This finding also aligns with Whisler (1956) who describes the relationship between the "Assistant to" and others in the organization as an exchange, that is based on sharing information. When describing why the "Assistant to" interprets decisions made by their leader for others in the organization Whisler writes

> …these interpretations are the coin with which the assistant-to repays those who keep him [sic] informed of developments at lower operating levels and with which he [sic] 'buys' a general willingness to cooperate with him [sic]. They are motivated by curiosity about his [sic] motives and by concern that he [sic], in turn, be aware of what is taking place at lower levels (p. 276).

Chaleff (2009), when describing the relationship that should exist between a leader and follower states "Two essential elements of relationship are developing trust and then using that trust to speak honestly when appropriate; one without the other is meaningless" (p. 23). His assertion appeared to be true for many participants in this study. As the participants talked about their relationships with their respective vice presidents and how the relationships manifested themselves, many of them mentioned the importance of honesty and trust. In several situations they did not use these terms, but it could be reasonably inferred that one or more of these characteristics could be used to describe their relationship with their vice president.

Honesty allows the “Assistant to” to share information that may be difficult to hear about an SSAO’s decision or how they are being perceived by others. Honesty allows the “Assistant to” to share an opinion that may run counter to the direction that the vice president wishes to take on an issue. Trust enables a vice president and others to confide in the “Assistant to.” It also allows for the vice president to feel comfortable with the “Assistant to” speaking or acting on their behalf. Most participants indicated that they played a gatekeeping role for their vice president. In order for the “Assistant to” to be empowered to do that, there must be trust from the vice president.

**Lack of Articulated Passion for Working With and/or for Students**

In addition to the themes and roles that are mentioned earlier in this chapter and in Chapter Four, there was another “theme” that is worth noting. Although all of the participants interviewed worked in student affairs organizations, only four specifically mentioned the role that working with students played in their work in a substantive way and indicated that they enjoyed working with students. There were only a few participants whose primary responsibilities included working with students, but this finding was still surprising. A number of participants mentioned students tangentially, for example one participant mentioned having to explain the institution’s budget making process to student leaders. Three mentioned their work with students only after being asked if they had any student contact toward the end of the interview. In one instance the participant had several students working for them in communications roles, and in another instance the participant taught a class. When discussing the experience of working as an "Assistant to" almost none of the participants mentioned anything related to working with students or how their work contributes to their success at their respective institution.

I personally found this to be surprising. When I served as an "Assistant to" and in subsequent positions where I had significant student contact, I always considered that contact to be one of the most enjoyable aspects of my position. If I was asked about my experience working as an "Assistant to," I would almost certainly have commented on that aspect of my job and the role that I played in helping students succeed at my institution. My job responsibilities were similar to some of the participants, including responsibilities for special projects, budget, and communications. It is possible that for many of the participants the student contact that they had, if they had any, is so incidental to their role that it is not seen as a major contributor to their experience. However, it seems odd that staff who work in student affairs, particularly in the student affairs central office would not articulate a passion for working with students or at least on their behalf, as they described their work.

**Relation to Chaleff's and Kelley's Model Follower Typologies**

As noted in Chapter Two, both Kelley (1992) and Chaleff (2009) also presents a typology of followers. In Kelley's model the ideal follower is *The Exemplary Follower* and within Chaleff's model the ideal followers is *The Partner*. According to Kelley, Exemplary Followers

> …exercise independent, critical thinking, separate from the leader or the group…They are actively engaged, applying their talents for the benefor of the

> organization….they 'take initiative,' 'assume ownership,' 'participate actively,' 'are self-starters,'…and 'go above and beyond the job' (pp. 125-126).

According to Chaleff, The Partner

> …gives vigorous support to a leader but is also willing to question the leader's behavior or policies. This individual could be said to be a true partner with the leader and displays many of the characteristics identified with courageous followership… (pp. 40-41).

Chaleff also identifies several attributes associated with those who demonstrate the Partner style of followership. These attributes include cultivating relationships, holding self and others accountable, having peer relations with authority, and confronting sensitive issues.

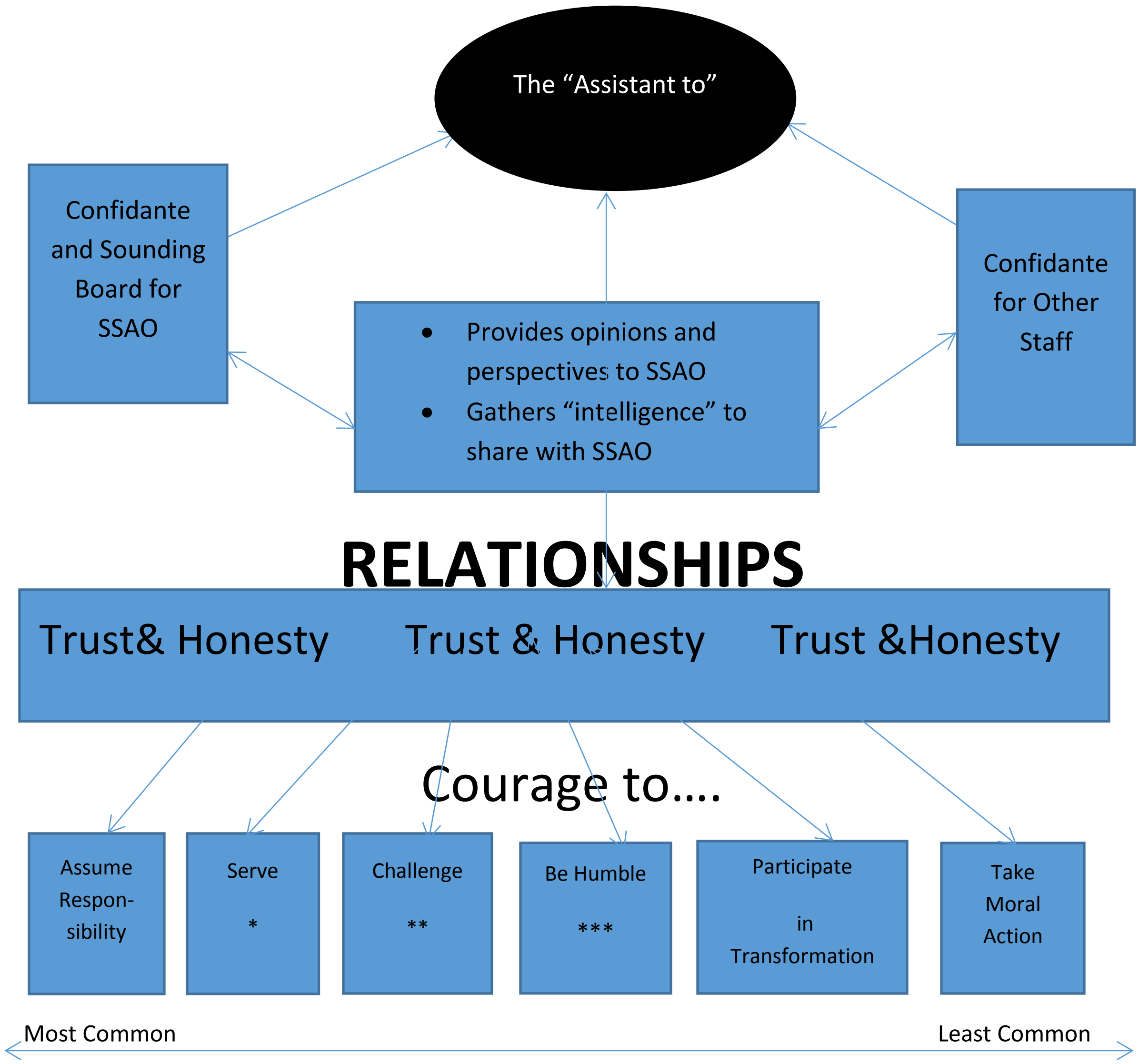
Based on interviews, and my data analysis I would assert that most of the participants in this study would be considered Exemplary Followers under Kelley's (1992) model and would be consisdered to demonstrate The Partner style of followership within Chaleff's (2006) model. As noted previously most participants indicated that they have demonstrated initiative, engaged in self assessment and personal growth, and gave feedback to their SSAO (sometimes on sensitive issues). As a group they are indivduals who seem to be actively engaged in their organization and active contributors to its success.

**A Proposed Model**

As noted in Chapter Three, this study used a "generic qualitative study" strategy of inquiry. Such a strategy is used when the primary desired outcome is to understand a phenomenon, process or the perspectives of those involved (Merriam, 1998). This strategy of inquiry is not used to develop a theory, as is the case with grounded theory. This study was focused on exploring the "Assistant to" position within student affairs using the Courageous Follower model posited by Chaleff (2009) as a conceptual framework. After analyzing the data and considering the findings I have several observations.

Based on the interviews with the participants the demonstration of behaviors of the Courageous Follower does not seem to be equal across the five dimensions in the model. It appears, at least with regard to this study, that "Assistant to's" are likely to demonstrate these dimensions in the following order from most likely to least likely: Courage to Assume Responsibility, Courage to Serve, Courage to Challenge, Courage to Participate in Transformation, Courage to Take Moral Action. This is also the order in which they are presented by Chaleff (2009). Figure 3 on page 286 displays visually the findings for a revised model, that will be discussed next. .

Figure 3: Model of the Applicability of the Courageous Follower Model to the Role of the "Assistant to" in Student Affairs




**Additional Behaviors**

***Courage to Serve:** Serving as a confidante for the SSAO; Gathering information for the SSAO, Building relationships with others to benefit the organization
****Courage to Challenge:** Sharing information about concerns or issues gained from other staff with the SSAO
*****Courage to Be Humble**: Not being in competition with your SSAO and others in the organization; Articulating an explicit desire for the SSAO to succeed; Having the ability to discern when it is appropriate to share your opinion and when it is not; Being willing to not receive public acknowledgement for some of the work that you do; and Being willing to admit when you are wrong and/or that you do not know something

Although it is not in Chaleff's (2009) model, I would advocate for adding the Courage to Be Humble to the model. As noted previously in this chapter, as well as in Chapter Four, several participants either specifically mentioned that humility seemed to be lacking in the current model and/or they made comments during their interviews that highlighted the role that humility plays in their work. The proposed Courage to Be Humble would be demonstrated by a follower who is not in competition with their SSAO and others in the organization, articulates an explicit desire for the SSAO to succeed, has the ability to discern when it is appropriate to share their opinion and it is not, is willing to not receive public acknowledgement for some of the work that they do, and is willing to admit when they are wrong and/or that they do not know something.

In addition to supporting the addition of the Courage to Be Humble, the data also supports adding several components to the Courage to Serve and the Courage to Challenge. During the course of the interviews several participants discussed behaviors that were not articulated in Chaleff's current model, but could be included within the Courage to Serve such as, serving as a confidante to your leader, having the ability to gather information about the organizations and opinions within the organization and sharing them with the leader, and having the ability to build relationships for the good of the organization.

The "Assistant to" appears to play several roles vis a vis their SSAO, as well as other staff within the organization. For the SSAO they are serving as a confidante and a sounding board. For others in the organization they can also serve as a confidante. Serving as a confidante and sounding board for the SSAO enables the "Assistant to" to share their opinion and perspective with the SSAO. Serving as a confidante for staff within the organization or institution allows the “Assistant to” to gather “intelligence” which can be shared with the SSAO.

Based on the data analysis is appears that the existence of a good relationship between the “Assistant to” and the SSAO contributes to their ability to carry out the roles above in the extent to which the “Assistant to” demonstrates Courageous Follower attributes, as well as their ability to play the roles noted above. A good relationship with the SSAO and with others in the organization, particularly one that is characterized by honesty and trust contributes to the ability of the “Assistant to” to play their various roles.

The model in Figure 3 shows the roles that the “Assistant to” an SSAO plays with regard to the SSAO, as well as others within the organization. The roles facilitate the ability of the “Assistant to” to provide their opinion and perspective to the SSAO and to gather “intelligence” from other staff to share with the SSAO. The roles that are played by the “Assistant to” are facilitated by having relationships that are characterized by trust and honesty. Such relationships in turn enable the “Assistant to” demonstrate the various behaviors of a Courageous Follower to varying degrees beginning with the Courage to Assume Responsibility which seems to be the most commonly exhibited behavior and ending with the Courage to Take Moral Action, which appears to be the least common. The model also includes the proposed Courage to Be Humble. It is placed in the middle of the model, because it is not clear to what extent those in the “Assistant to” role demonstrate this dimension. Although, there is evidence to support that it should be part of the model. The model also displays possible additional secondary behaviors to the Courage to Serve and the Courage to Challenge. Since this proposed model is based on a study of the “Assistant to” within student affairs organizations. A study of staff in similar roles in other types of organizations might not have similar findings. However, this model provides a way of understanding the role of the "Assistant to" the SSAO within the context of the Courageous Follower model.

## Implications for Practice

There are several implications for practice which stem from the findings. For those who work (or wish to work) in student affairs organizations, there are implications for SSAO, individuals who are in the "Assistant to" position, and individuals who are considering an "Assistant to" position. There are also implications for those who work as an "Assistant to" in higher education outside of student affairs, senior leaders within higher education organizations, as well as senior administrators in a variety of areas outside of higher education. This study can also impact the articulation of a career path for those in the "Assistant to" role.

**Implications for the SSAO**. With regard to the SSAO, the findings, particularly those related to how the "Assistant to" contributes to the success of the vice president and/or the success of the student affairs organization, can provide support for those SSAO who wish to add such a position to their staff. Although there are limitations to the study, which will be discussed later in this chapter, there appears to be support that these positions can contribute to the success of the SSAO and the organizations which they lead.

In addition to providing support to making the case for creating such a position, the study provides useful information about qualities to seek during the search process. The various behaviors of the Courageous Follower can provide guidance with regard to interview questions, as well as required or preferred requirements in a job description for an "Assistant to." For example, a job posting for an "Assistant to" position might include the following as required or preferred qualifications: experience demonstrating initiative and identifying problems within an organization; demonstrated ability to establish relationships with peers throughout the organization; ability to exercise judgment regarding taking actions on behalf of your supervisor; or willingness to raise ethical concerns with your supervisor.

The findings related to the importance of the relationship between the SSAO and the Assistant to may encourage SSAO to consider the extent to which they believe they can establish a relationship with the person who they are considering hiring as an "Assistant to." Additionally, as noted in Chapter Four, "Assistant to's" also are able to build relationships with others within their student affairs division and elsewhere at the institution. Therefore it would be important for SSAO to provide opportunities for others within student affairs and the institution to participate in the evaluation of candidates for this position, with particular attention paid to whether they believe that they could work with the various candidates.

Once a person is hired as an "Assistant to," the SSAO can assess to what extent they and their "Assistant to" have a good relationship as one factor as they evaluate their performance. The SSAO can also consider to what extent they are comfortable using the "Assistant to" as a sounding board or confidante, as well as to what extent they provide them with "intelligence" regarding the student affairs organization, as well as their opinions. These emerged as important aspects of the position and while it is possible that an "Assistant to" can adequately perform the various job responsibilities in their job description, there are unwritten aspects of these positions that should be considered as well.

**Implications for staff in the "Assistant to" role.** For staff in the "Assistant to" role this study provides some guidance with regard to how they should do their job, in addition to the requirements of their respective job descriptions. Most of the behaviors associated with being a Courageous Follower may not be written in a job description, but they are important aspects of being an "Assistant to." As are some of the findings that emerged with regard to how "Assistant to's" carry out their responsibilities. For example, the findings provide some guidance to who are in this position about the importance of having a good relationship with their SSAO. For newer staff in this role, the findings can encourage them to be intentional about building good relationships with their vice president, as well as others within the division and outside of student affairs.

**Implications for staff considering the "Assistant to" role.** For individuals who may be considering the "Assistant to" role within a student affairs organization, this study provides them with some insight into what the job is like. In addition to knowing how some "Assistant to's" support their SSAO and contribute to their success and that of their organization, they will also have a better understanding of some of the positive aspects of these positions, from the perspective of those who hold this position, as well as the challenges. This study may also provide some insight into the nature of the optimal relationship between an "Assistant to" and an SSAO. A person seeking this role may wish to consider to what extent they think they can build a relationship with the person who is seeking an "Assistant to."

**Implications for others in similar roles.** Although this study focused on staff who served as the "Assistant to" for an SSAO, the findings have implications for those in similar positions, such as those who serve as a Chief of Staff in colleges and universities. In the scant literature within student affairs on Chiefs of Staff, their positions are often considered similar to that of an "Assistant to," but Tull and Kuk (2012), discusses them separately, devoting a chapter to each position. As a result, this study focused on those who had the title "Assistant to." However, anecdotally, I know that there are many individuals who work in student affairs organizations with the title Chief of Staff who have job duties very similar to those in this study, and vice versa. A few participants indicated that they are sometimes referred to as the Chief of Staff. In addition to those who work in "Assistant to" or Chief of Staff roles within student affairs or other higher education institutions, the findings may be instructive for those who hold similar positions in other types of organizations. The Courageous Follower attributes might manifest themselves differently in a corporate setting, or a hospital, or a large non-profit, or a governmental agency or a politician's personal staff, but the model provides guidance as important behavioral attributes of those who work as an "aide de camp" or the "right hand" for a senior leader.

**Implications for other senior leaders.** One of the primary findings of this study was the role that the "Assistant to" plays as a confidante or sounding board, as well as the role they play in providing intelligence about the organization to their boss. Whether or not a senior leader such as a president, vice president, dean, or elected official, has someone who works as an "Assistant to," Chief of Staff or similar position, they may want to make sure that there is someone within the organization who they have a good enough relationship with that they confide in them and seek their honest feedback regarding issues, decisions, personnel, etc. They should also consider whether they have relationships with individuals within their organization that will be able to provide with them the "word on the street" regarding concerns of those within the organization and reaction to decisions. This person may not necessarily need to report to the senior leader. Although this study only has the perspective of the "Assistant to" on the extent to which having a staff member who can serve as a confidante or sounding board is valuable, it is a reasonable assumption that it would be helpful to a senior leader.

**Implications for the "Assistant to" career path.** In Chapter Two I noted that Stringer (1977) wrote about the lack of a defined career path for those in the "Assistant to" position. He wrote:

> The lack of an articulated career path for "assistants to" is a particularly frustrating characteristic of these positions for the role incumbents. Younger assistants want to advance in postsecondary administration, and most would like to do so at their present institution; yet, in spite of the opportunity to observe the operation of their organizations at fairly high levels, their present positions do not seem to be preparing them for future administrative posts in their present offices or elsewhere. (p. 200).

I also noted that Mills (2000) wrote about similar concerns among middle managers within higher education generally, and within student affairs specifically. This study could result in more efforts to identify career paths for those in the "Assistant to" position.

Eight of the participants mentioned that they desired to move on to other positions within the student affairs field, including four who indicated that they wished to become an SSAO and three who indicated they wished to become an assistant or associate vice president/dean of students as part of their career trajectory. Four participants indicated that they might be interested in a position similar to their current one, but within a provost's or president's office. A few participants identified some of the challenges that the "Assistant to" position can present to someone who wishes to advance to positions higher positions within student affairs organizations. These challenges include not supervising units or staff.

This study can provide an impetus for some SSAO to be more intentional about how they help to provide experiences for their "Assistant to's" that will enhance their ability to continue to advance within the student affairs field, including moving on to other positions such as an assistant dean of students or assistant vice president for student affairs that can put them on the path to becoming an SSAO. This study may help those who serve in these positions to be intentional about seeking the types of experiences that may make it easier for them to become an SSAO. This study may also serve as a catalyst for discussion and exploration about which criteria are most important for those seeking the position of SSAO. For example, is experience supervising staff or managing a department, for example, more important than an in depth knowledge of issues associated with running a student affairs organization?

**Limitations**

As with any research study this one had several limitations. These limitations include the lack of sufficient gender and racial diversity among the participants, the lack of sufficient questions to explore complex dimensions within the Courageous Follower model (e.g., the Courage to Serve), using a single interview as the primary data collection method, only obtaining the perspectives of the "Assistant to's" as the described their work, and only examining this role at 4-yr public institutions.

**Lack of gender and racial diversity**. I initially intended to have an approximately equal distribution of male and female participants in the study. When I had interacted with colleagues at conferences who work in these roles, I did not notice a significant gender disparity among those in these positions. In order to enhance the gender diversity of my participants I personally sent multiple emails to several males who worked as an "Assistant to" for an SSAO according to information on institutional websites. I also asked a colleague to share information about my study during a meeting at the annual NASPA conference that would be attended by those who work as "Assistant to's," with a specific request for male participants. Despite these efforts, I was only able to find one male to participate in the study. While I did not visually observe that there was a gender disparity between men and women in this position, based on my participation in meetings with other "Assistant to's" at national conferences, I did notice that most of the individuals who I found in these positions when searching on institution websites were female. Given the inclusion of only one male in this study, the results may only be valid with regard to women who serve in the "Assistant to" role.

As with gender, I intended to have a more racially diverse pool of participants. Unfortunately, only three of the participants were people of color. However, for the most part there was no indication that their ethnicity played a role in how they did their job or impacted the extent to which they demonstrated Courageous Follower characteristics. Only one participant of color mentioned their race in the context of one of the interview questions, and it was not directly related to their ability to do their work.

**Complexity of Courageous Follower dimensions.** As noted in Chapter Three, in order to explore the various Courageous Follower dimensions two questions were asked of each participant. Some questions included multiple behaviors to which the participant could provide examples. In most instances the questions related to the Courageous Follower dimensions were based on questions from *The Followership Profile,* developed by Dixon (2003), which is a quantitative measure of the five Courageous Follower dimensions and associated behaviors. The remainder of the questions were based on Chaleff's (2009) discussion of the model. *The Followership Profile* has 56 questions and Dixon used at least seven questions in order to measure each dimension, and its associated behaviors. As noted in Chapter Three, there have been several studies conducted using this instrument, including one by Ray (2006), which explored to what extent Courageous Follower behaviors are displayed among community college administrators in North Carolina and to what extent one's position in the administrative hierarchy correlates with Courageous Follower behaviors. Ray administered the Followership Profile to administrators at three levels, including directors, coordinators, department heads who were considered Lower Administration ("Assistant to's" would likely have fallen in to this category). The order in which the Courageous Follower behaviors were demonstrated from highest to lowest among Lower Administration was as follows (the means for each dimension are in parentheses): Courage to Participate in Transformation (3.90), Courage to Serve (3.81), the Courage to Assume Responsibility (3.78), the Courage to Challenge (3.76) and the Courage to Take Moral Action (3.71).

In order to keep the interviews to a reasonable time I chose two questions for each dimension that in my opinion explored the primary and secondary behaviors of dimension. Only using two questions to explore each dimension, which consists of several behaviors, may have over-simplified the complexity of some of the Courage

Follower dimensions. As a result it is important to note that the participants either demonstrated or did not demonstrate the behaviors of the dimensions about which they were asked. They are many behaviors of each of the dimensions that they were not specifically asked about, although they may have been referred to some participants as they answered the questions.

**Data collection method.** The primary method of data collection for this study was a single interview which lasted approximately 60 minutes for each participant. This interview was also conducted via telephone. Several of the questions required the participants to recall events that have happened in the past, and some of them may have struggled to do so. There were several individuals who indicated in response to some questions that they had carried out a specific behavior, but could not provide an example. At the end of each interview I indicated that participants could email me to add to their interview responses if something came to mind following the interview. Only one participant did so. Since each person was only interviewed once and remotely, it may have been difficult for me to establish a good rapport with the participants. Orcher (2005) states that interviewers need to establish a rapport with participants in order for the data collected to be credible. One factor in establishing a rapport is matching the background of the interviewer with the participant. As part of the recruitment process, all participants were made aware that I previously held a position similar to the one that they currently hold, which would be an example of a similar background. Although the participants seemed to be fairly forthcoming, it is possible that some of them may have been unwilling to share information that might portray their SSAO in a poor light during a single interaction, which was not in person. As noted previously, hesitancy to share potentially negative information may have resulted in limited examples related to the Courage to Participate in Transformation and the Courage to Take Moral Action.

**Self-reported nature of experiences.** All of the information in the study was self-reported by the participants. Therefore, there was no corroboration of the examples that they provided in response to the various questions. A possible research design for this study could have included the SSAO to whom the participants reported to, but that would have added complexity, including making it much more difficult to protect the anonymity of the participants, and necessitating having both the “Assistant to” and the SSAO consent to participating in the study.

**Study limited to four-year public institutions.** The final limitation is that this study only included four-year public institutions in the United States. This set of institutions was chosen because of previous data indicating that the “Assistant to” position was more common at these type of institutions (Tull & Rammell, 2012). While my review of the data did not indicate that responses might be different if participants were at private institutions, it is possible. Additionally, due to the difference between 4-yr institutions and community and technical colleges, it is not clear to what extent these findings would apply to those type of institutions.

### Areas for Future Research

There are a number of areas of future research that could build on the foundation of this study. In some instances the future research could address limitations in this study which have been identified in the previous section. For example, although nothing emerged from the study in my opinion that indicates possible gender differences with regard to the work of the “Assistant to” and the applicability of the Courageous Follower model to their work, the intersection of gender and those who work as an “Assistant to” may be an area of future exploration since almost all of the participants were women.

As noted above this study only explored the perspective of the “Assistant to” with regard to the application of the Courageous Follower model and how their role contributes to the success of their student affairs organization and to that of their vice president. A future study might seek the perspective of SSAO regarding to what extent “Assistant to’s” who work for them exhibit Courageous Follower attributes, as well as how they contribute to their success and that of their organization. It might also be worthwhile to explore the perspectives of others within student affairs organizations regarding their perspectives on the work and contributions of those who are “Assistant to’s”.

Since this study focused on those who work as “Assistant to’s” in student affairs organizations, another area of future research would be to explore similar positions such as Chief of Staff in student affairs organizations, as well as other organizations within higher education, such as athletics, the president’s office, and colleges within a university. There may be value in also studying these roles in areas outside of higher education.

As noted in the Limitations section, this study only included 4-year public institutions. How the Courageous Follower model applies to the role of the “Assistant to” at other types of institutions is an possible area of inquiry.

One of the areas where the Courageous Follower model did not seem to apply was with regard to the Courage to Take Moral Action. As noted earlier in this chapter, the participants may not have had experiences with their SSAO that required them to react to a situation involving a possible violation of the “Assistant to” ethics or values. There may be value in exploring to what extent staff in student affairs organizations have ethical concerns regarding their SSAO. On a related matter, with regard to the Courage to Participate in Transformation. there may be value in exploring to what extent SSAO or other leaders of organizations within higher education display behaviors or have problems that can negatively impact the ability of their organization to carry out its mission.

Many of the participants in the study discussed their career aspirations, including several who wished to become SSAO. There would be value in exploring the career trajectory of those who serve or have served in “Assistant to” or similar roles and to what extent these roles either facilitate or inhibit their ability to move into more senior level positions within the student affairs field. On a related matter, there may be value in exploring how higher education programs prepare students for positions such as an “Assistant to.” In addition, the professional development needs of staff in these positions could be explored as well.

**Conclusion**

In 1904 Oberlin College created a new position in higher education when they hired Charles Williams to be the Assistant to the President (Giddens, 1971). Since that time the “Assistant to” position and similar ones, such as the Chief of Staff, have grown in their popularity at institutions of higher education across the nation. Within student affairs organizations, the position of the “Assistant to” the Senior Student Affairs Officer (SSAO) is a common one that appears to be growing in popularity, yet not much is known about these positions, including the work that they do and the contributions that they make to the success of their organization and/or the SSAO for which they work.

This research study sought to explore the role of the Assistant to the SSAO through the conceptual framework of the Courageous Follower model. This model identities five dimensions and a number of behaviors that are associated with individuals who are active contributors to their organizations in which they work and are a key part of the organizations success. Based on the findings of this study the Courageous Follower model provides a useful lens through which to view the work of the "Assistant to." Although none of the participants were familiar with this model, the majority felt that covered the key aspects of their position and how they do their work. A few suggested possible enhancements to the model, including several who supported including the issue of humility as one of the dimensions of being a Courageous Follower.

While the participants in this study did not demonstrate all of the behaviors associated with a Courageous Follower, they did exhibit several of them such that most of the participants were able to provide specific examples related to behaviors which were explored. Generally speaking, most participants demonstrated the primary and/or secondary behaviors of the Courage to Assume Responsibility, the Courage to Serve and the Courage to Challenge. The participants did not exhibit the Courage to Participate in Transformation and the Courage to Take Moral Action to the same extent, but it is possible that they may not have been provided the opportunity to exhibit those behaviors. Based on comments from the participants, there may be a need for an additional behavior, the Courage to Be Humble.

Part of the genesis for this study was my own experience working as an "Assistant to" inside and outside of student affairs. I would often be asked by friends, or colleagues who I met at conferences "What does an "Assistant to" do?" Lisa, when referring her position as an "Assistant to" said "It's not an easy job to explain to people." With regard to those who serve as the "Assistant to" for an SSAO, explaining their job may be a little easier because of this study. Lisa could tell someone who asked, that an "Assistant to" an SSAO is a person who reports directly to the SSAO and performs various tasks within the organization that are critical to its functioning. These tasks include those that might be written in a job description, such as providing oversight to core functions such as communications, assessment, and budgets, as well as special projects that arise. In some instances they are responsible for being a primary interface with students and families within the central office. From time to time they are asked to gather information for their SSAO regarding operations in the student affairs division, and connect with people who need assistance, but who do not need to get it from the SSAO directly.

In addition to the duties that might be part of their job description, the "Assistant to" plays several other important roles within their organization. They often serve as a confidante or sounding board for their SSAO and as a confidante for other staff, because they have good relationship with both entities. Being a confidante and sounding board for their SSAO allows them an opportunity to provide input on decisions or problems that the SSAO faces. Being a confidante for staff enables the "Assistant to" serve as a key conduit for information from others in the organization about their concerns, which they can in turn share with the SSAO. They also help to defend the SSAO to others in the organization by explaining his or her decisions and providing context. On a regular basis the “Assistant to” has to decide whether they should speak or act on behalf of the SSAO or consult with them first on a matter of concern. The ability to do this well enables the SSAO to focus on more important tasks. The “Assistant to” takes initiative by identifying problems that should be addressed and volunteering to make improvements. They also are willing to challenge their SSAO when needed and give them feedback on their behavior, particularly when it negatively impacts other staff. The role of the “Assistant to” is not without challenges, but it is an enjoyable position, but best for someone who enjoys working behind the scenes and not always getting public acknowledgment for the work that they do.

This research will hopefully help validate the work of the “Assistant to,” as well as help them and others understand the work that they do. This study also helps to draw attention to the role of the follower in the success of organizations. As demonstrated by the participants in this study, followers can make key contributions to the success of their organization and that of their leader. They are not merely subordinates waiting for direction or assignments from their leader. They can be active contributors as they help their organization achieve its common purpose. To some they may be seen as leaders within their organization, but to vis a vis their leader, they are a follower. As this study has demonstrated, some of them may even be courageous.

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## APPENDIX A: CAS STANDARDS FUNCTIONAL AREAS 2012

- Academic Advising Programs
- Adult Learner Programs and Services
- Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drug Programs
- Assessment Services
- Auxiliary Services Functional Areas
- Campus Activities Programs
- Campus Information and Visitor Services*
- Campus Police and Security Programs*
- Campus Religious and Spiritual Programs
- Career Services*
- Clinical Health Services
- College Honor Societies
- College Unions
- Commuter and Off-Campus Living Programs
- Conference and Event Programs*
- Counseling Services*
- Dining Service Programs
- Disability Resources and Services
- Education Abroad Programs
- Fraternity and Sorority Advising Programs
- Graduate and Professional Student Programs and Services
- Health Promotion Services
- Housing and Residential Life Programs
- International Student Programs and Services
- Internship Programs
- Learning Assistance Programs
- Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Programs and Services*
- Master's Level Student Affairs Professional Preparation Programs
- Multicultural Student Programs and Services
- Orientation Programs
- Parent and Family Programs*
- Recreational Sports Programs
- Registrar Programs and Services
- Service-Learning Programs
- Sexual Assault and Relationship Violence Prevention Programs*
- Student Conduct Programs
- Student Leadership Programs
- Transfer Student Programs and Services*
- TRIO and Other Educational Opportunity Programs
- Undergraduate Admissions Programs and Services*
- Undergraduate Research Programs
- Veterans and Military Programs and Services*
- Women Student Programs and Services

http://www.cas.edu/index.php/standards/

# APPENDIX B: STUDENT AFFAIRS COMPETENCIES

# (AS ADOPTED BY ACPA AND NASPA)

Advising and Helping

Assessment, Evaluation and Research

Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

Ethical Professional Practice

History, Philosophy, and Values

Human and Organizational Resources

Law, Policy and Governance

Leadership

Personal Foundations

Student Learning and Development

## APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The questions that were typically asked during the interviews are listed below. The type of question and/or its relation to the previously identified research questions is noted in parentheses. Several of the questions below are in italics. Several of these questions are adapted from *The Followership Profile* and are intended to explore core behaviors of each the five dimensions or of a Courageous Follower. During the process of identifying interview participants I gathered demographic information regarding gender, ethnicity, age, educational background, length of time worked within student affairs, length of time worked within their current position, etc.

1. I have your reviewed your job description, but describe the primary responsibilities of your position. (Research Question 3 & 4)
2. Tell me about your experience working as an "assistant to." (Research Question 3 & 4)
3. What is the most difficult aspect of your position and why?
4. How do you think your role helps your student affairs organization meet its goals and objectives? (Research Question #3)
5. How do you think you help to contribute to the success of your SSAO? (Research Question #4)
6. I would like to ask you to share your thoughts about the term courageous follower, as it relates to the work that you do. What do you think it means? (Research Question #1)

7. *In what ways have you demonstrated your ability to assume more responsibility for the organization by initiating ideas and actions on your own?* (Research Question #1; The Courage to Assume Responsibility)

8. *In what ways have you demonstrated the ability to do any of the following: engage in self-assessment and personal growth,* influence the culture of your organization, *or improve processes?* (Research Question #1; The Courage to Assume Responsibility)

9. In what ways have you demonstrated that you can discern when you can speak or act for your SSAO and when you need to consult with them first? (Research Question #1; Courage to Serve)

10. *In what ways have you demonstrated the ability to do any of the following: improve communication processes,* serve as a gatekeeper, *defend your SSAO,* manage conflicts between your SSAO and other leaders*?* (Research Question #1; The Courage to Serve)

11. In what ways have you challenged or stood up to your SSAO? (Research Question #1; Courage to Challenge)

12. *In what ways have you given feedback to your SSAO on her/his behavior?* (Research Question #1; The Courage to Challenge)

13. In what ways have you had to help your SSAO change a behavior that might threaten the ability of the organization to meet its goals? (Research Question #1; The Courage to Participate in Transformation)

14. *In what ways have you modeled for your SSAO your ability to change?* (Research Question #1; The Courage to Participate in Transformation)

Courage to Take Moral Action

15. *In what ways have you advised your SSAO about concerns that your personal values and principles might be threatened or compromised?* (Research Question #1; The Courage to Take Moral Action)

16. *Describe a situation where an action taken by your SSAO caused you to consider resigning your position or reporting the action to a higher authority?* (Research Question #1; The Courage to Take Moral Action)

17. Considering the work that you do and Chaleff's behavioral attributes of a courageous follower: The Courage to Assume Responsibility, The Courage to Serve, The Courage to Challenge, The Courage to Participate in Transformation, The Courage to Take Moral Action, are there any additional behaviors that you would propose adding and why? (Research Question #2)

18. What do you think are the most critical skills and personality traits of those in your position and why? (Research Question #2)

19. Is there anything else you would like to add as we have reached the end of our interview?

## APPENDIX D: INITIAL RECRUITMENT E-MAIL TO PARTICIPANTS

Good day,

My name is Amelious Whyte and I am a graduate student in the Department of Organizational Leadership and Policy Development at the University of Minnesota. I would like to invite you to participate in my research study designed to explore the applicability of courageous follower behaviors to the role of the “assistant to” within student affairs organizations in the United States.

In order to be selected as a participant you must:

- Serve as an “assistant to” for a senior student affairs officer (and report directly to that person)
- Serve as an “assistant to” for the same individual for at least one year
- Work at a public, four-year institution of higher education in the United States
- Not have taken The Followership Profile (aka the courageous follower assessment tool) previously
- Not be personally acquainted with me

If you meet the above criteria and are selected as a participant I would request an interview lasting between 75 and 90 minutes with you. The interview would be conducted remotely via telephone and will be audio recorded by for transcription purposes. You will remain anonymous throughout the research process and no personally identifying information about you or your institution would be included in my dissertation. Participants would only be identified with a pseudonym, their race, approximate age, and gender and institutions would only be identified by approximate size and the region of the country where they are located (e.g., Midwest, Northeast, etc.) You will be given a pseudonym at the start of the interview and your name will not be known to anyone but me. If you are selected to participate in this study you will be also asked to subject a current job description.

In the interest of transparency you should know that I am employed by the University of Minnesota within the Office for Student Affairs and I have held the position of an “assistant to” both inside and outside of student affairs, although I am currently in a different position, I also spent approximately 10 years as the Chief of Staff in the Office for Student Affairs. My professional experiences have led me to this research topic.

If you are interested in participating in this research project, please fill out this brief form [link provided] which asks the following questions:

- What is your name?
- What is your current title?
- What is your current institution?
- What is your gender?
- What is your race or ethnicity?
- What is your age?
- What is your educational background, specifically what degrees do you have?
- How long have you been worked within the student affairs profession?
- How long have your worked within your current institution?
- How long have you worked within your current department?
- How long have you worked within your current role?
- Have you worked in this role for someone other than your current SSAO?
- Have you taken The Followership Profile?

If you have questions, please contact me at awhyte@umn.edu or you may contact my advisor Dr. Darwin Hendel at hende001@umn.edu.

Thanks in advance for considering my request,

Amelious N. Whyte, Jr.

PS Please feel free to share this email with colleagues who may currently serve as an “assistant to” senior student affairs officer.

# APPENDIX E: CONSENT INFORMATION SHEET

INFORMATION SHEET FOR RESEARCH

**An Exploration of the Role of the "Assistant To" in Student Affairs Using the Courageous Follower Model**

You are invited to be in a research study of the applicability of the Courageous Follower model to the role of the "assistant to" in student affairs organizations in public 4 year higher education institutions in the United States. . You were selected as a possible participant because you responded to a request for study participants and you met the various selection criteria. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Amelious N. Whyte, Jr., Doctoral Candidate, Organizational Leadership Policy and Development, University of Minnesota.

**Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

- Participate in one interview lasting approximately 60-90 minutes, which will be conducted via telephone and recorded for transcription purposes.
- Submit a copy of your current job description.

**Confidentiality:**

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only I will have access to the records. However, I will share a copy of the recorded interview with the individual who will be transcribing the interviews. They will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement in advance and they will be instructed to delete the electronic file of the interview after completing the transcript. In addition, prior to the beginning of the recording each subject will be given a pseudonym and their actual name will not be used during the recording, nor will I refer to the name of your institution. The recordings will be erased within a year of the completion of the dissertation for which this research is being conducted.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University of Minnesota. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

**Contacts and Questions:**

The researcher conducting this study is: Amelious N. Whyte, Jr. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact them at 128 Pleasant Street SE, Room 109, Minneapolis, MN 55403; 612-624-2678, awhyte@umn.edu. You can also contact my advisor, Dr. Darwin Hendel, at (612) 625-0129, hende001@umn.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), you are encouraged to contact the Research Subjects' Advocate Line, D528 Mayo, 420 Delaware St. Southeast, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455; (612) 625-1650.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.