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Factors that Shape the Crisis Management Styles of Former and Current  
Senior Level Student Affairs Administrators at The University of Mississippi

A Dissertation  
presented in partial fulfillment of requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
in the Department of Higher Education  
The University of Mississippi

by

SHANNON B. RICHARDSON

November 2011

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## ABSTRACT

Campus crisis intervention and management are hot topics among student affairs professionals and the world of higher education. Policies and protocols surrounding crisis preparation and response have received much publicity through research studies and peer-reviewed articles. However, little material has been published regarding the factors that contribute to the crisis management styles of student affairs administrators- leaders that are on the front lines when a crisis occurs. This dissertation is a phenomenological study of seven past and present senior-level student affairs administrators at The University of Mississippi. These seven administrators were interviewed and asked questions about their crisis experiences, crisis training, institutional culture, and the evolution of their management styles throughout their careers. The results from the data reveal a fascinating blend of several similar themes and occasional differences in factors that affect crisis management style. The data from interviews was compared with data collected from the administrators' vitas to provide greater validity and fill any gaps in the research. The intent of this study is to encourage other university administrators to recognize and ultimately improve their own crisis management styles to enable them become more effective leaders in crisis situations at their respective institutions of higher education.

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my father, Don Baker, for believing in me and showing me that faith and perseverance are the keys to overcoming any obstacle. Daddy, you are my inspiration and my hero, and you are the strongest man I know. I love you. -Honeypot

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Words of gratitude go to my husband Hunter and my daughter Emma for allowing me to spend time away from you to complete this goal, for helping me complete my transcriptions, and for loving me unconditionally, even when I was less than loving during this long journey. I adore you both so much, and you've both played a crucial part in this journey. I also thank my father, Don Baker, for helping me transcribe interviews and encouraging me to keep going when I felt tired or overwhelmed. You always believed in me, and now the dream is a reality. A special note of thanks goes to my mother, Andrea Baker, for lovingly watching Emma on nights and weekends so that I could have time to work on my research; you are the strongest, most selfless woman I know. I thank my advisor, Dr. Lori Wolff, for her guidance, patience, and kindness throughout this process. I thank my other committee members, Dr. Ann Monroe, Dr. Sparky Reardon, and Dr. Marc Showalter, for their valuable time and expertise during and between both of my defenses. I thank my colleagues in Campus Recreation, and my supervisor Bill Kingery for his support during this process. I am grateful to the administrators in Student Affairs for their encouragement and contributions. My family, friends, and fellow doctoral students have been a tremendous source of encouragement, and I am thankful for all of these people. Above all, I give thanks and praise to almighty God for His faithfulness and His grace, as nothing is possible or worthwhile without His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Romans 8:38-39

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## CHAPTER I

### Introduction

In September of 2004, I became a staff member within the Division of Student Affairs at The University of Mississippi. My first day of employment began just one month after a horrific fire killed three students in a fraternity house on the Ole Miss campus (Esterbrook, 2004). Less than three years later, a student at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech) committed the largest campus shooting in American higher education history when he opened fire on the Blacksburg campus, killing 32 people before committing suicide (Davies, 2008). These events and others fueled my interest in student crisis intervention within higher education. Although the perpetrators and victims of crisis events are often rightfully studied and discussed, I also find value in sharing and learning from the perspectives and experiences of the people who intervene, manage, and lead in times of crisis. Administrators are also victims in crisis situations as they deal with the aftermath of emotional stress and professional scrutiny.

Originally I wanted to do a case study of the campus violence and crisis prevention and intervention protocols used by universities to highlight the evolution of crisis management policy. However, as I began to research this topic and speak with colleagues, my research focus shifted from legalistic policy development toward the human component of crisis intervention. My research has progressed to discovering the factors that shape the crisis intervention and management styles of collegiate administrators, specifically within the realm of student affairs. By interviewing former and current University of Mississippi senior level student

affairs administrators, I discovered the factors that influence the crisis management styles of these leaders and the common themes that emerge within this case study. This research will enable administrators at other higher education institutions to identify, compare, and reflect upon the factors that influence their own crisis intervention styles and methods.

### *Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this dissertation was to reveal the major factors that shape the crisis management styles of senior level student affairs administrators at The University of Mississippi. Interviewing previous and current administrators allowed me to learn about different generations of leadership and identify each administrator's progression of crisis response from the beginning of their career to their current professional position. Growth and development of each leader was attributed to certain factors and revealed a trend toward certain crisis management styles. This research may serve as a catalyst for other university administrators to internally investigate and understand their own management styles, which may help them become a more effective leader in crisis situations at their institution of higher education.

### *Research Questions*

By interviewing senior level student affairs administrators, this research sought to answer the following research questions:

- 1) How did University of Mississippi senior level student affairs administrators (UM administrators) manage crisis situations that occurred early in their professional careers?
- 2) What notable crisis situations were UM administrators involved in throughout their careers? Why were these crisis situations notable?
- 3) What factors contributed to the crisis management styles and decisions of UM administrators?

- 4) How did the general leadership and management styles of UM administrators relate to their crisis management styles?

To answer these research questions, I interviewed senior level student affairs administrators at The University of Mississippi, and supplemented each administrator's interview data with their vita to fill in any missing or unclear interview content.

First, I reviewed the literature that currently exists on the topics of general leadership, crisis management, and the history of The University of Mississippi. My review began with literature on leadership and crisis management, followed by even more specific literature of student affairs crisis management and intervention. Finally, I reviewed a brief history of The University of Mississippi, from the institution's founding in 1848 to the current year of 2011. This history offered a perspective into the culture and climate of this southeastern institution of higher education. It was relevant to understand the institutional culture in which The University of Mississippi student affairs administrators have operated and continue to operate. After I reviewed the literature on the topic of crisis intervention styles, I interviewed selected senior level student affairs administrators regarding their experiences with crisis events they have managed, and then I analyzed and interpreted the interview data and provided the results in the final chapter.

### *Significance of the Study*

The findings from this study will encourage student affairs leaders to introspectively assess their own crisis management styles. By identifying their personal styles, administrators may have a better understanding of their responses to crisis situations and identifying any management areas in which they need to improve.

### *Definition of Terms*

To understand the nature of crisis management within student affairs, the term “crisis incident” was first defined. According to Zdziarski, Dunkel, and Rollo (2007), there are three major types of crisis incidents that affect college and university campuses: environmental disasters caused by nature, facility crises resulting from an infrastructure failure, and human crises occurring when a person or persons cause an emergency situation. Hurricane Katrina hit the gulf coasts of Mississippi and Louisiana in 2005, but the destructive aftermath of the category-five storm is still evident on the campuses of the University of Southern Mississippi, Tulane University, and the University of New Orleans. This disaster is a perfect example of an environmental crisis. A facility emergency involves a building or structure collapse or malfunction, such as the collapse of Minard Hall at North Dakota State University in 2009 (Dalrymple, 2010). There are also various levels of crises, including critical incidents, campus emergencies, and disasters. Critical incidents do not affect the campus as a whole, but are limited to a segment or subgroup. Campus emergencies are events that disrupt operations of the university, affecting all aspects of campus order. Disasters have impact beyond the borders of the campus and the effects are felt by more than just university constituents (Zdziarski et al., 2007).

One of the main job descriptions of student affairs administrators is to protect and govern enrolled students in the absence of their parents. “Historically, educational institutions’ control of student behavior and ability to function *in loco parentis* were the standards by which we measure our relationship to students and our commitment to the families who placed their children in our charge” (Zdziarski et al., 2007, pp. 3-4). In all types of crises, the preparedness and response of student affairs administrators is crucial to the immediate effects felt by the victims, institution, and the public. Institutions of higher education vary in the degree of policy strictures within

student affairs and the autonomy with which student affairs administrators have to manage in crisis situations. In the aftermath of the shootings at Virginia Tech in 2007, research focused mainly on protocols and plans for preventing and intervening in times of campus violence and crisis. One doctoral student wrote about best practices of effective procedures in preventing campus violence and pulled examples from many incidents of campus violence throughout American history, including the Virginia Tech tragedy (Hughes, 2008).

Student affairs administrators deal with crisis situations on a daily basis; however, major crises are normally the only newsworthy events that are vividly exposed by media. “On August 1, 1966, Charles Joseph Whitman ascended the University of Texas Tower, in Austin, and in 96 minutes fired 150 high-powered rounds of ammunition down up on unsuspecting university family” (Lavergne, 2007, A22). In 1999, a 40-foot bonfire collapsed on the campus of Texas A&M University, killing 12 students and injuring 27 others. A fraternity hazing incident at the Yale University in 2003 caused the death of four young men who were part of a group of new pledges forced to ride blindfolded around New York City. The driver of the automobile containing the pledges lost control of the vehicle and hit a semi truck, killing four and injuring five of the fraternity brothers (Nuwer, 2009). In 2007, a Virginia Tech student opened fire on classmates and faculty members, killing 32 people and injuring many others before committing suicide (Song, 2008). One of the most recent acts of campus violence occurred on the campus of Northern Illinois University after a former student opened fire on a classroom, killing six and injuring 16 others. In an interview following the violent attack, Brian Hemphill, Vice President for Student Affairs, remarked “One of the things I’ve realized is that not having an answer is not an option. We’re talking about people’s lives and them being able to move forward from this point” (Sander, 2008, p.A26). These events are perhaps some of the most infamous disasters that

have occurred on campuses of American higher education institutions, but other (possibly less famous) events have occurred in the lives of every student affairs professional and are just as emotionally impactful to those individuals. Given the stress and diverse social factors present on our campuses, there is little doubt that there will be more such tragedies in the future.

Along with written policies and protocols germane to each institution of higher education, every student affairs administrator possessed a certain level of autonomy by which to react to situations. The gray area between policy and autonomy was where life experiences factored into management style. I believed the three main factors that shape the crisis management style of student affairs administrators were previous crisis management experiences, the culture of the institution at which the crisis occurred, and formal crisis training. The University of Mississippi student affairs administrators provided an ideal case study to qualitatively assess the factors that affect crisis management style of student affairs leaders within institutions of higher education. The interviews with these administrators revealed if the three factors I previously identified were indeed influences of crisis management style and to what extent each of them influenced crisis management decisions; in addition, the interviews will determine if there are others factors I have not yet identified. This research was meant to focus on the reflective thinking process that “involves personal consideration of one’s own learning. It considers personal achievements and failures and asks what worked, what didn’t, and what needs improvement” (Given, 2002).

### *Delimitations of the Study*

This research was designed as a case study that involved a select group of seven senior level administrators within a specific division at a single institution of higher education. The institution is a public, comprehensive, research university with an enrollment of 12,851 students



on the main campus during the fall semester of 2011 (UM Institutional Research and Assessment Website, 2007). The university is located in a southern town with a population of 18,916 people reported in the 2010 census (Oxford City Profile Website, 2011). These specific parameters were set to adequately collect data in a manageable timeframe and location. The research questions were selected to keep the scope of the study controllable.

### *Limitations of the Study*

Because of the small sample size and boundaries of this study, there may be constraints of generalizing the results of this research to other administrators at other institutions. The results of this study may or may not be able to directly describe the larger population of student affairs administrators. The data collected during this research was from the senior-level administrators' viewpoints, and was not cross-referenced by anyone else who interacted professionally with these leaders. The intent of this research is not to generalize findings beyond the scope of the study, but rather to encourage other leaders to discover the factors that affect their own crisis management styles. "Qualitative generalization is a term that is used in a limited way in qualitative research, since the intent of this form of inquiry is not generalize findings to individuals, sites, or places outside of those under study" (Creswell, 2007, p. 193).

### *Conclusion*

In this phenomenological study, I assessed the crisis management styles of upper level student affairs administrators at The University of Mississippi. The resulting data offers perspectives of various ways of handling crises on college campuses, and encourages other student affairs leaders to introspectively determine their own crisis management styles. The second chapter of this research provides a literature review of the history of crisis management within higher education as well as a history of student affairs at The University of Mississippi.

Chapter three discusses the methodology by which the data was collected and analyzed, and chapter four provides the themes derived from interview data. Chapter five presents the conclusions of this research and implications for further research.

## CHAPTER II

### Literature Review

Four topics were reviewed to provide a literary background on general leadership, crisis management, student affairs crisis management, and The University of Mississippi. This literature review revealed scholars' perspectives on the styles and characteristics of leaders, crisis management and student crisis management styles, and the history of The University of Mississippi. This literature served as a tool to compare the self-described characteristics of the interviewees with the predefined terminology, theories, and styles that currently exist regarding leadership and crisis management. The history of The University of Mississippi offered a description of the climate and culture of the institution at which all of the interviewees currently work or have previously worked.

#### *General Leadership Qualities*

Examining the literature on leadership qualities proved daunting because so much has been written concerning this topic. I identified leadership literature that was most salient to the nature of student affairs administrators. Understanding foundational elements of leadership is necessary to later build upon the literature of more specific crisis intervention literature. In his book *Good to Great*, Jim Collins illustrated a hierarchy of leadership that has five levels; at the bottom is the highly capable individual, then the contributing team member, the competent manager, the effective leader, and at the very top, the level five executive. Collins stated that “fully developed level five leaders embody all five layers of the pyramid” (Collins, 2001, p.21).

The traits of personal humility and professional will were included in Collins' hierarchy. These general leadership qualities translated across all realms of management, including higher education and student affairs (see figure 1).



**Figure 1: Jim Collins' Level 5 Executive Model**

In addition to the characteristics of leadership presented by Collins, another distinguishing quality I found pertaining to leaders was their style of human resource management. Whether a leader is autocratic or democratic determines the type of oversight a manager imparts upon those under his or her supervision, including in times of crisis. Tannenbaum and Schmidt discuss the differences between autocratic and democratic leaders in succinct detail within their 1958 article in the *Harvard Business Review*. “The problem of how the modern manager can be ‘democratic’ in his relations with subordinates and at the same time maintain the necessary authority and control in the organization for which he is responsible has come into focus increasingly in recent years” (Tannenbaum & Schmidt, 1958, p. 162). The authors formulated a continuum of leadership behavior with “boss-centered leadership” located on one end and “subordinate-centered leadership” located on the other end. Both ends depicted

an extreme form of leadership behavior, and a partnership between the two ends existed somewhere in the middle (Tannenbaum & Schmidt, 1958). Determining whether a student affairs administrator is more autocratic (boss-centered) or democratic (subordinate-centered) is crucial toward understanding crisis management style. Tannenbaum and Schmidt (1958) also stress three main factors or forces that are relevant when a manager chooses how to lead: forces in the manager, forces in the subordinates, and forces in the situation. Forces in the manager included his or her value system, confidence, leadership inclinations, and feelings of security in an uncertain situation. Forces in the subordinate included his or her need for independence, readiness to assume responsibility, tolerance for ambiguity, interest in the problem, understanding of organizational or situational goals, and possession of knowledge needed to deal with the problem. Forces in the situation include the type of organization, group effectiveness, the problem itself, and the pressure of time (Tannenbaum & Schmidt, 1958). Student affairs administrators must evaluate all three of these forces when choosing how to lead in a crisis situation.

Leaders' morals and ethics also played an important role in their actions and decisions during a crisis situation. "Most leaders exercise a significant fraction of their power and authority through the making of decisions. Indeed, one of the tests of a leader's importance is whether anyone is really affected by, or cares about, the decisions he makes. And a leader's legacy is often determined by the long-term effects of his decisions" (Sample, 2002, p. 71). Former University of Southern California president Steven Sample discussed the seemingly impossible decisions that leaders must make at times, and described a situation where a soldier driving a military truck is rounding a mountainside in enemy territory and a little girl suddenly dashes out into the road chasing a ball. The soldier must immediately choose whether to intentionally hit the

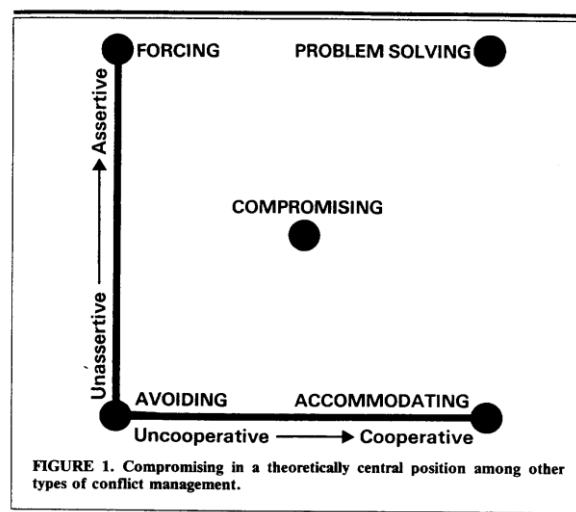
little girl and save himself along with the top secret information he carries, or to swerve off the side of the mountain, sparing the little girl but killing himself and destroying the valuable military information. Sample used this illustration as an example of identifying “which hill you are willing to die on” (2002, p. 108), a kind of moral choosing where a leader must know his limits. “These questions are so tough, so painful, that most people simply refuse to address them at all. They can’t bring themselves to face up to really difficult moral choices. But doing so is the essence of good leadership, and often of effective leadership as well” (p. 108). Student affairs leaders are no different in that sometimes a situation will arise that can be a life and death situation, such as a gunman on campus, a suicide watch, or a dangerous activity like sorority or fraternity hazing. The student affairs administrator could be faced with deciding between several really bad outcomes, none of which are optimal, but one of which must be chosen. So what factors influence these types of decisions? The collective literature on general leadership qualities suggests that the level of leadership, style of human resource management, and personal moral and ethical background are crucial influences in the decision-making processes of crisis management.

### *Conflict Management Styles*

Several styles of conflict management were identified and defined by several authorities within the disciplines of business management, social psychology, and education. According to Muffett-Willett and Kruse (2008), executive coaching is a key model of crisis training. “Executive coaching typically involves a paid external consultant to formally ‘coach’ an executive through decision-making processes. Executive coaching emphasizes ongoing executive development and creates a safe place to foster and encourage executives to take risk,

develop, and ultimately change their organizational behaviors” (Muffett-Willett & Kruse, 2008, p. 252).

Another crisis management style involved the concept of compromising, which “refers to the realization of a mutually acceptable settlement between two conflicting parties in which each party makes some concession” (van de Vliert & Hordijk, 2001, p. 681). Blake and Mouton (1964) developed a conflict grid whereby the conflict management style of compromising exists in a theoretically central position among four other types of conflict management. As shown in Figure 2, the four other types of conflict management are positioned on the corners of a square and they are as follows: forcing, avoiding, accommodating, and problem solving.



**Figure 2: Blake & Mouton’s Conflict Grid**

However, van de Vliert and Hordijk (2001) submit that their research indicates that the compromising style is more in line with the styles of accommodating and problem solving.

Along with styles of crisis management was the concept of simply following a protocol that has been established by crisis management experts that provide leaders with a concrete rubric for decision-making in a crisis situation, regardless of personal crisis management style. Greenstone and Leviton (2011) state that effective crisis management must follow this order:

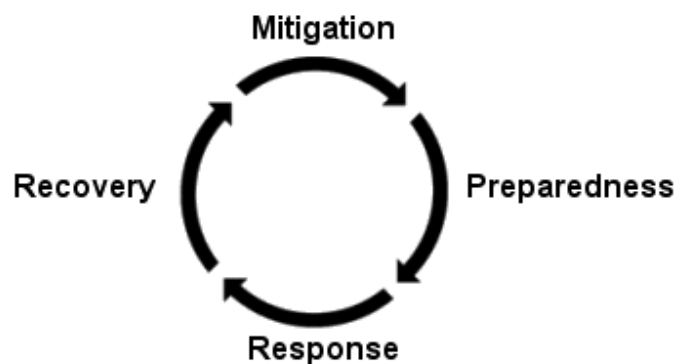
immediacy (acting to stop the emotional or physical bleeding), control (of the situation), assessment (of the situation), disposition (deciding how to handle the situation), referral (to appropriate professionals after the event), and follow-up (with the victim(s) as needed).

### *Student Affairs Crisis Management Styles*

“Colleges and university campuses across the country routinely engage in helping students deal with traumatic events, such as the death of a student, violent behavior, and other tragic events” (Epstein, 2004, p.294). Many crisis management models and plans have been adopted and implemented within student affairs divisions in institutions of higher education. However, little research has been conducted about crisis management styles specific to student affairs administrators, which affirms the importance of conducting this research. A gap existed in the current literature pertaining to the influencing factors on crisis management styles of student affairs administrators. The purpose of this research was to fill that gap. In a recent peer-reviewed article, student affairs colleagues from several institutions wrote a compelling statement that “campus crisis management is not a singular set of actions after which a campus can be declared prepared. Instead, “crisis management is an ongoing, cyclical, and adaptive process through which a campus seeks to continuously improve its ability to either avoid or manage the impact of a crisis event” (Jablonski, McClellan, & Zdziarski II, 2008, p.7). These authors also stressed that ongoing mock scenario training, not just protocols, is the key to effective crisis management. In their publication *Crisis Management: Responding from the Heart*, Harper, Paterson, and Zdziarski (2006) explained the Crisis Management Model developed by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (see Figure 3) which is circular and begins with mitigation followed by preparedness, then response, and finally recovery (Harper et al., 2006). This model was a basis for the Crisis Management Cycle developed by Zdziarski, Dunkel, and Rollo (2007) that



includes the five phases of planning, prevention, response, recovery, and learning. Planning was the stage in which university leaders think about whom at the institution will manage crisis events, and the protocols they will use to manage. Prevention involved determining the steps that administrators will take to avoid crisis situations where possible. Response involved the actions taken and protocols followed by leaders during a crisis. Recovery happened in various timeframes after a crisis event, and includes things like financial recuperation, building reconstruction, counseling, and memorial services. Learning involved determining the successes and failures of the other four phases within the Crisis Management Cycle in the effort to improve those areas before the next crisis.



**Figure 3: Harper, Paterson & Zdziarski's Crisis Management Model**

Most literature that was currently available regarding campus crisis intervention and management focused on the tactical preparation and actions taken before, during, and after a crisis event. A void existed that discussed the influencing factors on styles of crisis management among student affairs professionals. For instance, in the Virginia Tech tragedy, the tactical responses and aftermath of the shooting on the Blacksburg campus was thoroughly analyzed by

media and scholars, but little attention was paid as to why those in student affairs responded the way they did. Were they trained beforehand and acted upon that training? Did they have any previous experiences with a violent student that influenced the decisions that were made on that terrible day? Did the culture and environment of the institution persuade leaders to make a certain decision? What factors lead those leaders to make the decisions they made? These are the questions I asked the administrators at The University of Mississippi about their experiences as a campus leader.

### *Historical Highlights of The University of Mississippi*

David Sansing and Allen Cabaniss each published a very thorough and comprehensive history of The University of Mississippi, covering the years before the birth of the university through the twentieth century. Nadine Cohodas also penned a detailed account of The University of Mississippi during the Civil Rights Movement. Thomas Reardon, current Assistant Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs and Dean of Students at The University of Mississippi, published his dissertation on the life of Frank Moak, former Dean of the Division of Student Personnel. I used all of these historical publications to provide a brief overview of the university, focusing primarily on events related to student affairs and crisis management. Understanding the evolution of culture and environment of this University is crucial because the senior level administrators selected for this case study are current or previous employees of The University of Mississippi, and the environment and history of the institution at which they serve may affect the decisions made by them.

The University of Mississippi's history is one of intrigue, and Reardon summarized it best in his own dissertation, "Frank Moak's Legacy": "The story of The University of Mississippi is one replete with struggle and change, with accomplishment and failure, and with

hard work and success. In one century, the university found itself on the edge of closing because of two wars; one that went well beyond the bounds of its native Lafayette County and one that was waged in the pastoral setting known as ‘Ole Miss’. The history includes stories of political interference, of battles with deeply held customs and traditions, and of a constant striving to redefine itself in its own eyes and in the eyes of the nation” (Reardon, 2000, p. 1).

The University of Mississippi originated from a land-grant given by the federal government that provided the first “free school system” university in Mississippi, funded primarily by taxation instead of tuition (Sansing, 1999). The University of Mississippi opened her doors in 1848 with one president, three faculty, and eighty students. The early days of the university were not immune to crisis events and disruptions. “The university suspended operation for health reasons only once, in 1853 during an outbreak of smallpox, and delayed its opening only three times, during the yellow fever epidemics in 1878, 1888, and 1897” (Sansing, 1999, p.23). The student body consisted of freshmen and sophomores, the majority of which were Mississippi residents. The early days of campus life were filled with undesirable student conduct, including disrespect of the professors, brawls between classes, refusal of students to attend classes, and the subsequent dismissal or disappearance of enrollees. Faculty members were disgusted by the overall lack of discipline and resented the idea that they must act *in loco parentis*, a Latin phrase meaning to supervise in the place of a parent (Brubacher & Rudy, 2006). Several professors threatened to leave. It was not until the introduction of several support staff whose specific duties were to assist with the daily operation of campus life that the faculty became less burdened with the task of supervising the non-academic components of student life (Sansing, 1999). These support staff became the foundation that eventually grew into a structured student affairs division at the University.

In 1882, the admission of eleven women into the student body initially received serious opposition (Cabaniss, 1971). “Typical of the arguments against coeducation was an assertion in the January 1876 issue that women’s ‘reasoning powers...cannot sustain long and intricate trains of thought’” (Sansing, 1999, p. 137). The inclusion of females on campus generated a new set of challenges for faculty and staff; the construction of female dormitories on campus created one set of administrative headaches, while the academic competition between male and female students produced quite another stir. The first graduating class that included women was in 1885; female student Sallie Vick Hill ranked highest on the honor roll, with superior academic achievements than her male classmates (Cabaniss, 1971).

After the Civil War ended in 1865, Greek organizations arrived on campus with the chartering of a Sigma Alpha Epsilon fraternity chapter; in 1881, “when the board voted to abolish the fraternity system in a crackdown on student misconduct, there were twelve active Greek societies at the university” (Sansing, 1999, p. 139). The presence of a “lewd woman” in a male dormitory was believed to be the cause of the sanction, which was later repealed after a suspected bribe was given to a board member to reinstate the Greek system (Sansing, 1999). The college board of trustees acted as the chief governing body for the institution, and issued disciplinary actions during incidents of inappropriate student conduct. But as time passed and more students enrolled in the university, more support staff were hired to fulfill the administrative and disciplinary duties on campus, relieving the board and faculty members of this cumbersome charge. The end of the nineteenth century marked a rapid growth of colleges and universities, with a greater emphasis on campus construction and buildings that would better serve the students’ needs. As a result of these transitions that continued within higher education, the student affairs profession developed out of a necessity to separate the academic proceedings

from the conduct and disciplinary issues. Faculty did not want to deal with extracurricular student activities, so the advent of various staff positions arose after students began participating in collegiate athletic and intramural sports teams, fraternities and sororities, and various clubs and organizations (Komives & Woodard, 2003). The employees within these staff positions became the chief persons responsible for students' well-being while they were away from home and parents.

The beginning of the twentieth century marked the beginnings of the formal establishment of the student personnel profession nationwide. The position of "dean" would be the first administrative title used in relation to student personnel services (Reardon, 2000). In 1919, the Conference of Deans and Advisors of Men was held at the University of Wisconsin, and this meeting defined the birth of the organization now known as NASPA: Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education. In 1937, the American Council on Education met and created a document called "The Student Personnel Point of View" which would define the "statement of philosophy, purpose, and methods of practice that clearly established the foundation for the field's future growth and devoted the proper attention to the student's growth" (Reardon, 2000, p.50).

For its part, The University of Mississippi had evolved from an "old aristocratic university into a new democratic institution" (Sansing, 1999, p. 183) after the seventh chancellor took office. The new administration's goal was to provide higher education for all socioeconomic classes, not just the wealthy, by implementing a "student labor fund and self-help bureau" (Sansing, 1999, p. 183). The social class differences between rich and poor students began to manifest themselves in behavioral issues with which the support staff on campus continued to deal. The University of Mississippi continued to experience a growth in student

enrollment, adversely affected only by the Great Depression and the first and second World Wars when young men were called into service and young women became active in the American Red Cross. Between and after the World Wars, the university experienced significant overcrowding, and the classroom and residence facilities would no longer accommodate the resurgence in admissions due to the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, also known as the G.I. Bill of Rights. This legislature provided college education funding for returning World War II veterans, and therefore The University of Mississippi experienced an exponential student enrollment post-World War II. This struggle to provide enough quality space for students resulted in the Mississippi state legislature appropriating capital funding toward the construction and renovation of campus facilities (Sansing, 1999).

After weathering the wartime and economic troubles of the 1930s and 1940s, The University of Mississippi experienced a relative calm over the next decade. The university then moved into the sixties, a decade characterized turbulent by Dean Reardon. “The assassinations of John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr., riots in large cities, U.S. military involvement in foreign countries, and the civil rights movement would all contribute to the era’s volatility on college and university campuses” (Reardon, 2000, pp. 56-57). Between the years 1946-1949, the University restructured and reorganized into four administrative divisions: Academic, Comptroller, Student Personnel, and Financial Secretary (Reardon, 2000). In 1960, the University experienced the return of one of its distinguished alumni, Dr. Frank Moak. Dr. Moak accepted the position of Director of Placement and Financial Aids, a position which included recruiting new students to the University. This duty was not made easy in the next few years, as the relative on-campus peace of the fifties was shattered in 1962 when the civil rights movement enabled James Meredith to enroll at the university as the institution’s first African-American

student. Riots erupted on campus causing the mobilization of the Mississippi Army National Guard and other military police to convene and swarm the grounds near the Lyceum with tear gas to combat the insurrection. Two people were killed and countless others were injured before the law enforcement officers were able to take control (Sansing, 1999). The University of Mississippi's history of racial tension and segregation has been the focus of writers and media over many years. Civil rights author Nadine Cohodas wrote, "Even the school's affectionate nickname—Ole Miss—bespeaks its place in the legacy of the South: now used as short for Old Mississippi, 'Ole Miss' was once a term of respect used by slaves for the wife of a plantation owner" (1997, front cover flyleaf by the author). Racial reconciliation at The University of Mississippi began after the admission of James Meredith and continued to progress, albeit slowly, throughout the subsequent years.

The two decades between 1967 and 1987 were titled "the eve of a new millennium" by David Sansing because of the attempts by student affairs administrators and student leaders to combat the nation's views of the institution. "The public perception of [T]he University of Mississippi, shaped during a long night of racial violence and reinforced by three decades of controversy over the Rebel flag, is not inaccurate, but it is incomplete; it is a truthful image, but it is only part of the truth" (Sansing, 1999, p. 314). Not every student rioted at Meredith's admission to the university, and some welcomed and accepted him. "In 1987 the university established the Awards of Distinction, an annual ceremony that gives special recognition to a select group of black Mississippians" (Sansing, 1997, p. 334). University leaders continued to promote racial relations on campus; in 1964, Frank Moak was named Dean of the Division of Student Personnel and continued his service as a student personnel administrator until 1983. In 1980, the Division of Student Personnel became the Division of Student Affairs, whereby the

Assistant Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs and Dean of Students positions were created. (Reardon, 2000).

Relative peace followed for the next decade, with little recorded in the way of controversy on campus. During that time, the Division of Student Affairs underwent a name change and became the Division of Student Life (Reardon, 2000). Fast forward to the year 1997 when a resolution was adopted “asking students to do what will be most beneficial for the advancement of The University of Mississippi and refrain from waving the Confederate flag at Ole Miss athletic events” (Sansing, 1999, p. 341). Thirteen years later, university stakeholders were allowed to vote on a new athletic mascot to replace the incumbent mascot of 30 years, Colonel Reb, “a seemingly genteel Southern planter” (Boren, 2010, p.1). This vote was governed by a student committee, with the Dean of Students serving as an advisor. “The new mascot, inspired by Oxford author William Faulkner's work ‘The Bear,’ won 62 percent of the vote” (Boren, 2010, p.1) and The University of Mississippi took another step in combating its racially charged identity.

The racial history, tension, and politics surrounding The University of Mississippi continue to force university administrators, especially leaders within student affairs, to make monumental decisions that continue to influence student life on campus. Currently, the continued advancement of technology and communication serve as tools that both help and hinder university leaders in times of crisis. Social media, smart phones, and internet sites can enable administrators to notify the student body of emergencies in a timely manner, but can also create a mass panic situation once the information is released. The most recent example of this was the swine flu scare of 2009. The student health center sent a mass email to the entire campus warning of the impending H1N1 strain of the influenza virus (commonly called the swine flu).



Students and employees immediately became worried and swarmed the health center to get flu vaccines. This health crisis was averted by creating several vaccine administration sites around campus along with educational material in subsequent emails.

### *Conclusion*

This literature review provides context for the reader to better understand the research that currently exists involving general leadership, crisis management, and student affairs crisis management. Determining the relationship between general leadership styles and crisis management styles is essential in discovering how leaders react and respond during a crisis situation. The literature review also serves as an overview of the historical events that occurred at The University of Mississippi, specifically related through the lens of student affairs personnel. Nobel Prize-winning author William Faulkner once said, “To understand the world, you must first understand a place like Mississippi.” To understand a person, you must first understand the environment in which they live and work. The evolution of the Division of Student Affairs at Ole Miss addresses the constantly changing culture and climate under which administrators worked and continue to work. Institutional environment could be an influencing factor on crisis management styles, which is a significant component to one of my research questions. I hope to answer this research question based on the data I receive from interviewing past and present student affairs administrators about the institutional environment at The University of Mississippi. The research design is outlined in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER III

### Methodology

The qualitative research approaches used in this study were a combination of case studies and phenomenological inquiries of the crisis management experiences of senior level student affairs administrators at The University of Mississippi. Creswell defines a case study as “a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher explores in depth a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals. Cases are bounded by time and activity, and researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time” (2009, p. 13). Phenomenological research helped me to “identify the essence of human experiences” during specific events; narrative research will enable the researcher to “ask...individuals to provide stories about their lives” (Creswell, 2009, p. 13). As the purpose of this dissertation was to reveal the major factors that shape the crisis management styles of senior level student affairs administrators at The University of Mississippi, this style of research enabled me to achieve that purpose by collecting stories from the administrators I interviewed.

The factors that influence the crisis management styles of student affairs administrators at The University of Mississippi were identified during personal interviews with each administrator and supplemental information obtained from the administrators’ vitas. Every student affairs leader is faced with making difficult decisions, and these interviews provided a safe forum in which to tell their stories. Themes emerged from the interviews that suggest certain existing

crisis management strategies. Other findings revealed management styles that do not fit within any predefined supposition.

### *Researcher's Role*

As an employee of The University of Mississippi since 2004, I have worked under several of these administrators and have been a part of several crisis management task forces. As such, my role as a researcher included being a participant and observer within the realm of student affairs crisis intervention at The University of Mississippi. Each time I hear about another major disaster that occurs on a university campus, I am sympathetic because I can envision the stress and emotions that those administrators must go through during and after the crisis event. During my preliminary design for this research dissertation, I heard a story about two administrators at another university who made a decision to expel two student athletes because of violations of the student code of conduct surrounding allegations of rape. Their superiors decided that one athlete (a member of the track team) could be dismissed, but the other athlete (a star player on the basketball team) would receive a lesser penalty and be allowed to remain enrolled. The student affairs administrators did not agree with this decision, and shortly after those students were given their punishments, the university informed the student affairs administrators that their contracts would not be renewed. That was “the hill upon which they chose to die” (Sample, 2011, p. 108), and subsequently they were forced find new positions.

As I wrote the interview questions, I asked myself how I would answer them. My answers revealed that I have little experience with true campus emergencies and disasters, and the experience I do have is limited to “critical incidents” that involved emotionally unstable students or safety concerns within the outdoor recreation program that I supervise. I have had nominal formal training in the area of crisis management, limited to my attendance at a webinar,

several roundtable discussions, and my role on the crisis phone team. My view of the culture of The University of Mississippi is one of relative peace and security, and as such, I feel I have been shielded from situations that I have encountered at other institutions in larger, urban settings or with a higher student enrollment. Usually, my leadership style is a very democratic one, in that I try to involve students in decision-making as much as possible to foster leadership and professional development. However, when I am leading an outdoor recreation trip in the wilderness and I am faced with an emergency, my reaction is to act upon my own knowledge and expertise in the field of wilderness medicine without involving others until after the situation is under control. I have matured as a leader in my combined ten years within the student affairs division at two different institutions; I now take more time to review the facts before making decisions and I learn the entire situation surrounding a conflict before I determine the course of action to take. By answering these interview questions, I have identified the factors that have influenced my crisis management style and subsequently the areas in which I need to improve as a leader within my own role and position at The University of Mississippi.

My goal is to be a senior level administrator within student affairs, and as such, I know that I could have imposed some bias toward this research as I am passionate about discovering what makes administrators react the way they do during crisis situations. I also professionally know many of the administrators interviewed, and some are previous or current indirect supervisors. However, I endeavored to remain objective as I conducted this research. Before, during, and after the interviews, I followed proper protocols set forth by the Institutional Review Board and carefully observed the rights of the human subjects with whom I was in dialogue (Appendix C). My credibility as a researcher was enforced by my position as a doctoral candidate within the Higher Education program at The University of Mississippi. As a student, I

completed courses such as “Qualitative Research Methods” and “Research Methods I and II” that contributed to my knowledge of human subject interviews in regard to Institutional Review Board guidelines. I also mitigated any possible bias by utilizing a key informant to check the wording and impact of the interview questions. As such, I am confident and prepared that I conducted my research in an ethical and innocuous way.

### *Data Collection*

First, I asked one senior level administrator at The University of Mississippi to be my key informant, a person who “may become an especially useful source of information, be repeatedly interviewed, and thus earn designation as a “key informant” (Rieger, 2007, p. 1085). This key informant enabled me to conduct a trial interview to determine if the interview questions were effectively answering the research questions and insure that the questions were sensitive and appropriate.

After I validated the interview questions from the key informant’s responses, I identified the possible pool of interviewees based on the criteria outlined below. Each interviewee was a former or current administrator at The University of Mississippi within the Division of Student Affairs/Student Life. Another criterion by which I selected the interviewees was based on title. The interviewees’ administrative titles must include “vice chancellor,” a title addition which was introduced in the academic year 1980-1981 when the Division of Student Personnel became the Division of Student Affairs (Reardon, 2000, p. 277). Once I determined the pool of interviewees, I contacted each of them by email to request an interview, and I followed up by telephone if necessary. Directly after conducting the interview, I requested a copy of each interviewee’s vita. Each vita provided background information on the types of positions, professional organization memberships, conferences, and training workshops each administrator has experienced

(Appendix B). I conducted face-to-face interviews using Creswell's interview protocol, whereby "researchers record information from interviews by making hand-written notes, by audio taping, or by videotaping" (2009, p.183). Each interview lasted between 25-50 minutes in duration, depending on the amount of information each interviewee wanted to share. I used two audio taping devices (one for backup purposes), and I also handwrote notes throughout the interview.

These are the interview questions I asked each administrator:

- 1) What was the first crisis you encountered as a student affairs professional?
- 2) What was your title at that time, and what was your role in this crisis response?
- 3) How did you "think, act, and feel" during this situation, and how did that process inform and shape your decisions in future crisis situations?
- 4) During your career, describe the notable crisis situations in which you were involved.
- 5) What did you learn from each of those notable crisis situations?
- 6) What was the environment and culture of the institution at the time each notable crisis occurred? How did that environment and culture impact the way you managed each of those notable situations?
- 7) What type of training have you had in crisis management or crisis intervention throughout your career?
- 8) What are the formal trainings you have attended either in person or electronically (such as conferences, seminars, and webinars)? How have those trainings impacted your crisis management style?
- 9) What manuals or protocols have you used in preparation for or management of crisis events? How helpful are those tools?

- 10) Please describe your general leadership and management style. How does your general management style compare with your crisis management style?
- 11) How has your crisis management style changed throughout your career? What differences exist between how you managed crisis events that occurred early in your career and those that occurred during the time you held a senior level student affairs administrative position?

I conducted these interviews according to a standard format (Appendix A). After I transcribed the interviews, I employed the research technique of “member checking” which allowed each interviewee to review their interview transcriptions and confirm that statements they made during the interview were indeed what they wanted to share. Member checking ensured that as the researcher, I “got it right” (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2006, p. 104) and member checking also helped to minimize the risk of my own biases interfering with the process.

After the interviewees checked the transcriptions, I determined if a follow-up interview was necessary to rephrase any questions or ask additional questions to flesh out missing information. The questions to these follow-up interviews will be written after the initial interviews. “Repeat interviews throughout the course of the study will aid in developing rapport and increasing the validity of the interviews” (Glesne, 2006, p. 38). Both the interviews and the vitae collections enabled me to answer the following research questions:

- 1) How did University of Mississippi senior level student affairs administrators (UM administrators) manage crisis situations that occurred early in their professional careers?
- 2) What notable crisis situations were UM administrators involved in throughout their careers? Why were these crisis situations notable?

- 3) What factors contribute to the crisis management styles and decisions of UM administrators?
- 4) How are the general leadership and management styles of UM administrators related to their crisis management styles?

### *Data Analysis*

The sociological tradition of data analysis “treats text as a window into human experience” (Ryan & Bernard, 2000, p. 769). I used thematic analysis to code and segregate my data into data clumps for additional description (Glesne, 2006). I organized and prepared the data by transcribing all sessions to paper, typing notes from sessions, and separating and arranging the data according to the interview questions. Once I obtained a general sense of the overall themes and ideas stated by the interviewees, I began coding the data by segmenting sentences or phrases into categories and labeling those categories with a term (Creswell, 2009). After coding the data, I identified specific themes from the interviews and descriptions of the interviewees to form interpretations of the data and discover the relationships (if any) of the data to existing styles and influences of crisis leadership.

I employed multiple strategies to validate the research findings, including comparing the individual interview responses with the written vita data. I also researched sources other than the interviewees to provide context and strengthen the interview responses; examples of possible sources include literature about the environment and climate of institutions at which the interviewees managed and comparisons of national trends of campus crisis management. I also established validity by double checking the accuracy of transcripts and codes. Creswell defines triangulation as “examining evidence from the [data] sources and using it to build a coherent justification for themes. If themes are established based on converging several sources of data or



perspectives from participants, then this process can be claimed as adding to the validity of the study” (2009, p. 191). I developed themes from the data, and I used thick, rich description to describe the themes that emerge. Thick description “goes beyond the mere or bare reporting of an act (thin description), but describes and probes the intentions, motives, meanings, contexts, situations, and circumstances of action” (Denzin 1989, p. 39). Because the research is qualitative in nature, “the results will be presented in descriptive, narrative form rather than as a scientific report” (Creswell, 2009, p. 200).

### *Conclusion*

The research methods identified in this chapter provided the steps and sequence necessary to achieve the research purpose: to discover the factors that influence the crisis management styles of student affairs administrators. The following chapter presents the interview data, and the final chapter analyzes the data and presents conclusions for the study. The results of this specific case study will transfer to other student affairs leaders within higher education, as all universities employ leaders within the profession of student affairs who may benefit from discovering the factors that shape their own crisis management styles.

## CHAPTER IV

### Interview Data Results

To make sense of the large amount of data I collected from conducting seven lengthy interviews, I followed the data analysis approach outlined by John Creswell in his book *Research Design*. First, I prepared the data for analysis by printing a typed transcription of all interviews, reading through each response to understand a general sense of the information presented, and marking key phrases and ideas. Next, I cross-referenced my handwritten notes I took during each interview to clarify portions of the transcribed data. I then coded the data by grouping ideas, phrases, and concepts together which then allowed themes to emerge from the data. The themes are discussed in this chapter and are represented by using a “narrative passage to convey the findings of the analysis” (Creswell, 2009, p. 189). Finally, I provided a summary of the data analysis that provided a foundation for the conclusions I made in chapter five. The data I collected directly contributed to the purpose of this dissertation: to reveal the major factors that shape the crisis management styles of senior level student affairs administrators at The University of Mississippi.

During this qualitative study I conducted individual interviews with seven senior level student affairs leaders at The University of Mississippi. These interviews lasted in duration from 25 minutes to 50 minutes and were conducted privately in the administrators’ offices. I asked a predetermined set of eleven questions to each student affairs leader. I designed these questions to address the progression of crisis management throughout each participant’s career, the types of

crisis management each participant encountered, and the similarities of style between general leadership and crisis management style as a university leader. Each of the seven participants provided rich details of his or her experiences with crisis management in his or her career as student affairs administrator. After the interviews concluded, I collected each participant's vitae to fill in any gaps from the subjective interview responses with objective data contained within these records. During data analysis I compared each leader's answer to each question with the other six leaders' answers to that same question to determine similarities and differences in responses. This resulted in identifying themes within each interview question; some questions had multiple themes, and some had only one theme. This chapter summarizes the interview responses of the seven participants, and explores the common themes that developed within each question.

*What was the first crisis you encountered as a student affairs professional?*

The seven participants spoke of their initial experiences with crisis management early in their careers as a student affairs professional. Three responses involved fraternity incidents and racial tension, two responses pertained to automobile wrecks in which students were involved, and the other two responses were unrelated: one dealt with working with the FBI regarding the terrorist attacks of September 11th, and the other response dealt with personal crises that only affected individual students and their immediate families and friends.

*Fraternity crises involving race.*

Three out of seven responses were directly related to disputes involving racial tension between fraternities and minorities. The disputes were between Caucasian fraternity members and African-Americans. One administrator recalled an incident that occurred during spring break one year in which a group of University of Mississippi fraternity members visited a local bar and

became involved in an altercation in which accusations were made by the bar's employees that racial slurs were shouted by members of the fraternity. "It [the incident] received national attention because of the accusation was that racial slurs were shouted by members of the fraternity, and so in turn, it became a crisis." Another administrator shared about an event that occurred at a different southern university in the late 1970s or early 1980s when one of the fraternities wanted to host their annual "Old South Parade" through the streets of the town and campus, "which involved the [fraternity] dressing up in their confederate uniforms and their girlfriends wearing their antebellum dresses and riding on floats". The intent of the parade was to glamorize Civil War confederate supporters, and when the African-American students and citizens of the town became aware of this event, a counter-protest was threatened and the university leaders prepared for a major battle on the parade route. The university's administrators were concerned because "members of the African American student body as well as local African Americans decided that enough was enough in terms of that parade". A third fraternity incident occurred at a Midwestern university when "the black students took over the student center at the university in protest of the tuition increase that was announced for the following year...the rumor mill had it the [white] fraternities were going to go in and take back the student center." When I first conducted the interviews with these administrators, it occurred to me that several responses involved fraternities; what was not so apparent, however, was that those same responses also involved racial tension- and one of those incidents occurred at a university in the Midwest, while two occurred at institutions in the South. These three leaders vividly recalled these incidents as the first crisis they encountered as student affairs professionals. The combination of fraternities and racial tension was the most common theme among first crises encountered by these senior level administrators early in their careers.

*Automobile accidents involving students.*

The next most common theme discussed by the student affairs leaders involved students being injured or killed in automobile crashes. One administrator remembered his first crisis incident that involved one student who was critically injured in a car wreck in the late 1970s, and died a week after the accident: “I had just started here and really wasn’t in the role that called me to be the crisis person, I just ended up doing it.” Another administrator recalls being on staff at the time of a nationally publicized crisis: “in March of 1987, we had a sorority, the Chi Omegas, do a charity walk from Batesville to Oxford on Highway 6, and the girls walking were hit by a truck that had a trailer behind it, and five young women were killed, and there were many, many injuries, 12 or more serious injuries.” The Chi Omega walk-a-thon tragedy was mentioned several times, and various other references were made regarding fatalities involving students driving or riding as passengers in vehicles.

*Unrelated crises.*

A unique response given by one administrator involved a crisis of national scope, the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2011. “I know that wasn’t an on-campus crisis, but in my role as registrar at the time, it was indeed a crisis; we have a responsibility under federal law to protect privacy of records, but because we were in a state of emergency, that was lifted.” This administrator worked with the FBI in identifying an international engineering student from a country of interest who happened to have the same name and spelling as one of the Al-Qaida hijackers. The seventh administrator recalled many instances of personal crisis with individual students in his role in the Counseling Center, but did not refer to a specific crisis that occurred in his early career.

*What was your title at that time, and what was your role in this crisis response?*

Each interviewee's response to this question was markedly different; job descriptions were not defined the same way that they are today, and most titles have evolved to another name. The following titles were given during this question in the interview: Assistant Director of Student Activities, Coordinator of Student Religious Organizations, Residence Hall Director, Director of Financial Aid, Registrar, Assistant to the Director of the Counseling Center, and Interim Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs. Although the titles were very different, I received similar answers to the latter part of the question regarding their role in that initial crisis; one administrator remarked, "they [the administration] pretty much called out all of the senior staff in the division of student affairs to be available [to handle the crisis]." Another interviewee recalled "well, it was really odd. I think, as a university, we were not prepared for that type of crisis at all." Another response was "we were just much more loosely structured at the university at that time and we moved from one area to another...it kind of fell to me to deal with it." A common theme regarding the roles of these administrators during their first campus crisis became apparent during the interviews: no matter where they were working in students affairs, or what their title was at the time, they were expected to assist in responding to these emergencies.

*How did you "think, act, and feel" during this situation, and how did that process inform and shape your decisions in future crisis situations?*

Of all of the interview questions, the responses given to the "think, act, feel" question were the most varied of all of the eleven questions. I asked each interviewee to reflect on that first crisis situation they encountered as a student affairs professional, and to recall how they thought, acted, and felt during and after that crisis. Some answered all three dimensions of the question while others focused on one aspect. One administrator remarked, "It's very hard to look

at a parent in the eye on the front steps of the sorority house and say, ‘your daughter’s at the hospital’ or ‘your daughter’s been airlifted to Memphis,’ so I didn’t see there being much point in me being really emotional, and I tried really hard not to be.” That same administrator did not start processing the emotions felt during that crisis until late the next week because “we were so focused on the next thing we needed to do, if I would feel myself going to a pretty dark place personally, I would think, I need to focus on what needs to be done and I’ll deal with me later”. A similar response was given by another administrator: “I think if you’re going to be effective in the role [crisis manager] you have to suspend feelings...you’ve got to be able to put your feelings aside.”

Another administrator’s first crisis involved dealing with a mentally unstable student, and one thought kept surfacing: “how do I get him [the student] the help he needs?” This administrator remembered feeling for the students affected by that situation, because other campus leaders were not providing support or assistance to help this student. Reflecting on the feelings of the group of leaders handling a potential riot situation, one administrator recalled “I think there was a fear that things could get out of hand in a hurry....so there’s a good bit of anxiety, I guess, on the part of all the folks [university leaders] there.”

One administrator addressed the “act” portion of the question: “it’s always important that in responding to the press that you’re stating this in terms of what’s been reported and not stating it as facts until you actually have the facts. So you have to be very deliberate, to be methodical in gathering information to come to some type of decision. So I guess my, always my first reaction is that I need to gather the facts before making a decision.”

Several responses indicated that the crisis situation was one they had never experienced or encountered. “I just didn’t know what to think, and so the way that I acted was probably kind

of mechanical, you know? I just resorted to doing what I was asked to do...” In the same context, another administrator recalled:

I remember getting in my car and thinking, ‘what in the world, what am I going to do?’ because it’s not anything...I had never done that before. And I find that very often that’s the case when there’s an emergency, you know generally what’s going on but I find most of the time what I’m thinking is, ‘what am I going to do’. The thinking aspect for me is to, first of all, think as clearly and as rationally as I can and to try and look at, and this is again part of my personality, I am much more of a big picture kind of person, I am not so great with details, so I have a tendency to think about ok, what are we trying to do here...what are we trying to put together, who all is going to be involved; then I try to, from a thinking standpoint, I try to think about what needs to happen first in this immediate thing. The action part for me is that I know that one of the ways that I can be the most benefit is when I come into a situation, I want to bring a calm demeanor, I don’t want to throw any gasoline on the fire, I want to approach that and I want to be someone who deescalates things and tried to turn the energy down and of course, there are time when that’s maybe not as easy. But if I could bring a sense that I’m not out of control, even though the situation is out of control, then I think that provides a little bit of balance.

The administrator continued his thought pattern to include the way he felt when he reflected on times he was called in to visit the hospital emergency room to visit students who had been involved in an accident:

I remember when I first used to go down to the emergency room and I would be there, and maybe some kid had had a horrible accident, and I’d be talking to one of the ER people and they’d be eating a piece of pizza or something, and I’d be thinking how can



you...how can you be this way? And what I've found, [part of it is a way of coping with the experience but also part of it is saying, 'the way I help the most is not to be completely emotionally invested in this so that I'm losing my perspective.' Now that doesn't mean that I encounter these people and it's heartbreaking, and sometimes, sometimes in the moment, I'll be particularly affected by the person and their circumstances, but more often than not I find that I'm able to maintain a little objectivity until later on and then try to process it.

Among all of the "think, act, feel" responses, the common themes that emerged included thinking about the impact the crisis has on the student(s), acting in a way that most benefits the student(s) involved in the crisis, and putting personal feelings aside until the situation was handled so as not to cloud judgment or detract from successfully handling the situation.

*During your career, describe the notable crisis situations in which you were involved.*

Four out of seven administrators were present at the University of Mississippi in 2004 at the time of the Alpha Tau Omega (ATO) fraternity house fire that claimed the lives of three young men. All four of these administrators mentioned this crisis as one of the most notable crises in their careers. One administrator remarked, "...you just had major impact on the campus, everybody involved." Another responded, "the first thing that pops into my mind was the ATO fire because that was a heavy day. Oh my goodness and that heaviness was just felt around the campus." Another leader reflected, "I will always remember standing at the lobby of the Beta house and watching the ATO house burn down, and standing there with all these students and people and just sort of being struck by the moment, so powerful and so dramatic and thinking oh my gosh." The fourth leader responded to the question without hesitation, "It would have to be the ATO fire." When I prompted him to take me back to that time and describe why it was so

notable he responded, “because of the loss of lives that was involved in this, and that’s probably one that for me, it hurt the most because of the fact that there were three students that...that lost their lives.”

The Chi Omega walk-a-thon accident made the most notable list for two administrators. “The one I really cut my teeth on would be 1987 during the Chi-O accident where 20 women were walking in a walk-a-thon and a truck and a car hit them from behind, and five were killed, eleven seriously injured, and four walked away. And that was really I think at the point I realized the importance of crisis response and where I learned so much as I look back on it, particularly from the people from NOVA [National Organization for Victim Assistance]. This incident was also one of the first and most notable instances for another administrator. “...some of the girls, a lot of the girls that were on the walk but were not seriously injured, maybe they were taken to the hospital and received stitches or whatever, they were coming back to the house; they were horrified, they had seen a terrible, terrible accident, they had seen their close friends killed, severely injured, and they were just back at the house and they were emotionally just in shock...”

Natural disasters were notable because of the effects those storms had on families of students. “I think you’ve got to think about natural disasters that might happen other places but that affect student that are still here. For instance, Katrina...and you know sometimes we think of the limits of the United States, but we have to be sensitive to our international students when there’s a tsunami in Japan.”

The death of a police officer who was killed by a student under the influence of drugs and alcohol was notable to one administrator. “Those situations, I think the death situation, are the most notable crises to me.” Dealing with student suicides and student deaths affected several

administrators as they recalled notable crisis situations. “Any student death has been just very traumatic and if the incident happened on the campus because it was an accident, a suicide, or even off the campus, I’m the individual who marks the students’ records to ‘deceased’ and the date of death. And you always get this sickening feeling, you know? Sometimes it’s been because a student’s been ill, but anytime that happens, typically the person’s very young and you feel just very sorry for the family.” Another leader responded, “I remember one time in a job interview I was asked, ‘What’s the worst day you’ve ever had on your job?’ and I said the worst day are the days when students die, for whatever reason they decide, I can’t go on anymore.”

One notable incident involved a grievous error in software designed to administrate financial aid funds; the system distributed many funds twice to students, and this administrator had to deal with the crisis personally and judiciously. “Fortunately it was discovered at the time it was so the problem didn’t get any bigger. But believe me, that was a crisis. And it wasn’t just a crisis for our department, it was a crisis for the university because of the fact that the university was not in nearly as strong a financial shape as it is right now.”

A personal crisis for one leader occurred when his family was threatened after a marketing firm conducted a perceptions study for the university. Racial tension rose when the national media portrayed the marketing firm’s intentions as removing any and all references to the Old South (including the Confederate Cemetery, Confederate Drive, and Colonel Reb) from The University of Mississippi’s image. “And it blew up into a national situation...my name was on the homepage of one of the Ku Klux Klan offshoots websites, and our names were on their homepage in flames...I would get phone calls that start out with, we know you have two young daughters...basically some veiled threats... it lasted for months. The threats that I got were such

that I had to have plainclothes armed police protection to go to a couple of the home football games the following fall.”

The most prominent theme that emerged from this question related to the loss of student lives. Although other types of crises were mentioned as most notable, the vast majority of the responses pertained to incidents where students died. The causes of death of these students varied by incident, including automobile accidents, structure fires, hazing rituals, suicides, and natural disasters, but regardless of the cause, these crises affected the administrators more than any other incidents that they could recall.

*What did you learn from each of those notable crisis situations?*

Regarding dealing with stakeholders involved in crisis situations, one administrator submitted a response dealing directly with students: “the most important thing is to try to be as up front and transparent as you can.” Another leader added “expect the unexpected.” In managing the media, one administrator admonished, “if you’re going to be on the big stage, you’d better be ready to do that [defend your institution and your students].” Another leader remarked, “I learned that you need more people so that your roles don’t overlap.” When dealing with the loss of lives, one leader said “you’ve got to be most concerned about the [families of individuals who have died] and where they are and how we’re reporting to them the things that we know.” An almost identical response came from another respondent, “One of the things I’ve learned is that it’s important to have all the information possible before you communicate with people.” One leader over the years has recognized that he believes in a “holistic approach to students; that you’ve got to serve their academic, their physical, their social, their spiritual, and their cultural needs. In his opinion, “that’s a good model to apply to a crisis.” The responses to the question of what each leader learned in these notable crisis situations varied, but the

commonalities among the answers involved taking care of the student victims and their families immediately with as much honesty and sensitivity as possible.

*What was the environment and culture of the institution at the time each notable crisis occurred? How did that environment and culture impact the way you managed each of those notable situations?*

This question contained more similar responses than any other question in the interview. When speaking about the culture and environment at The University of Mississippi, three administrators answered almost identically. The first response: “You know, we stand up at orientation every year and tell moms and dads that we’re going to take care of their kids; we go out as recruiters on the road and say that Ole Miss is a family...” The second response: “Well, the one thing that we always talk about is that we’re family at Ole Miss...” The third response: “...even though people think it’s a cliché, we really do have the Ole Miss family, you know?”

Another comment about The University of Mississippi’s culture was that it was different from other southern public state institutions of higher education. “...but here [The University of Mississippi], not only with the Chi Omegas but with other student crises, I never had the sense that we had to protect the university, protect the institution, at all costs. I think that because of the size of this place [The University of Mississippi], because of the size of the state [Mississippi] maybe, my sense was always to do everything we could to help the student and the family.”

Another response indicated that the culture and environment were diverse at two different institutions at which this person was an administrator. “The culture was really different at the two institutions because with the University of Mississippi and the perception issue, it was a very personal issue to virtually everyone who’d ever been on the campus; and the situation really attacked the culture of the campus, and it became very, very personal for everyone involved.

With the hazing situation at [the other institution] and the hazing death there, the Greek culture of the institution was certainly impacted, because the stance that I took was very, very strong in removing that fraternity from the campus...and it happened during a time where we had eleven student deaths in an eight week period.”

One administrator acknowledged the evolution of the culture and environment, particularly with the employees, at The University of Mississippi. “you know, the staff in that office is a very different kind of staff than what we had we came in back in the 1990s.” This administrator continued by reflecting on how several staff members of yesteryear were very concerned about their own personal advancement, but that the staff today worked more as a team, focused on the student. The largest theme to emerge from this question is the perception that the staff at The University of Mississippi is a family, and as such, reacts to a crisis as a unit, working together to respond in a way that is best for the student(s) involved in the crisis.

*What type of training have you had in crisis management or crisis intervention throughout your career? What are the formal trainings you have attended either in person or electronically (such as conferences, seminars, and webinars)? How have those trainings impacted your crisis management style?*

These questions were listed separately on the interview protocol, but during the interviews, I realized that the questions were so similar as to warrant combining them into one inquiry. The responses varied from having a tremendous amount of training to having a very modest amount of training, and the types of training mentioned included media management, federal agency guidelines, professional organizations, and working with various non-profit groups. One administrator commented, “Over some thirty-one years of education, yes, I’ve had numerous conference and workshops, some through NASPA, others through other organizations. One of the things that I can say that is probably the most helpful was the media training that I received. That is something that I recommend for any crisis management team, that they receive

media training.” Another administrator mentioned attending a Federal Emergency Management Agency training as well as National Association of Student Personnel Administrators conference workshops. “Several years ago a number of university administrators were required to go to this FEMA training online, so there was a good bit of training there in terms of crisis management. But over the years, I have been at NASPA conferences that have had either general sessions or breakout session created to crisis management. A fellow by the name of Gene Zdziarski, he’s written a couple of books and he’s sort of the crisis guy...so I’ve been to several presentations he’s made in terms of crisis management.” Another administrator also mentioned, “ I’ve been to a couple of NASPA conferences, we’ve talked about that and I have a clear recollection of a training around something that’s more current, training around the behavioral intervention team and that sort of stuff.” NASPA received a third mention from another administrator: “When I left international education to become a general administrator, I focused then on crisis management through NASPA and ACPA and other organizations. And frankly, it was so much easier because English was everyone’s first language, the parents were usual within driving distance, they understood what you were saying, they understood our medical system, they understood our mental health system.” The National Organization for Victim Assistance provided invaluable training for one administrator. “I think working with NOVA in that first one [crisis] was the best training that I could have had, because I still apply what they [taught].” One administrator recalled attending several in-house trainings. “I know we had training on aggression management [Brett Sokolow]; we’ve had training on active shooter through UPD.” The same administrator also went to a pastors and leaders conference and attended a session on crisis management. One administrator acknowledged a lack official training: “you know, I really haven’t had any formal training in crisis management. It was never really covered in any of my

coursework, I don't remember going to any conferences that dealt with crisis management. Basically, it's learning on the fly, my personal experiences, and my contact with colleagues maybe during a situation." Collectively, the responses indicated a wide variety of training types, but the overarching prevalence of trainings took place at professional student affairs organizations such as NASPA and ACPA.

*What manuals or protocols have you used in preparation for or management of crisis events? How helpful are those tools?*

The use of written protocols, handbooks, or manuals in crisis management was discussed in lesser detail than attendance of crisis management trainings. One administrator, when asked about protocols or manuals, responded "none that I've used, but some that I've had on my shelf." Another remarked, "none come to mind. I mean you always have to be aware depending on the state where you are. Rules and regulation regarding information to the media, you need to be aware that it differs from state to state." One administrator discussed that the division of student affairs "did some work of establishing some protocols trying to help staff understand the nature of some things that could happen and what to do about them. I don't know that we necessarily called them crisis training, but we would put in place protocol for various situations and make sure that the staff understood what those protocols were." One administrator developed policies that assist in conducting workshops on crisis intervention. Included in those training policies is the standard that "student affairs professionals should not play dual roles in managing a crisis, so if you have anything to do with the student conduct system you need to be over here [on campus], you don't need to be in the hospital trying to take care of students because you're going to end up having to probably violate some trusts because you learn things." To separate the duties of crisis responders, a crisis action team was organized at The University of Mississippi. Within that team, the student affairs team is developing a manual and protocols to determine, as



one administrator described, “who’s going to man the phone line, and who’s going to do this, and when we need student records how is this going to happen, and are we sure our backups will work so we’ll have access...that’s the resource we have and I can tell that as things have happened, even with just the weather alert things, we are learning about how to tweak and make it better.” The collection of responses to this question included referencing published manuals and resources, adhering to unwritten yet understood policies, and relying on previous experiences to determine the proper response to a crisis.

*Please describe your general leadership and management style. How does your general management style compare with your crisis management style?*

While conducting these interviews, this became the single most intriguing question to me as the researcher because of my own perceived differences between the two management modes. The relationship between leading in a normal, predictable environment and leading in times of chaos and crisis is the similar for five of the seven interviewees but different for two leaders.

*Similar general leadership and crisis management styles.*

Colleagues of one administrator described him as a transformational leader, an attribute which he supported with the following statement that applies to both his general and crisis leadership styles: “in making my decisions, it’s easy for me in that the first question that I always ask is ‘is this the best decision for students?’ and once I can come to that, if I can resolve in my mind that is the best decision for students, then it become easier for me to make those decisions. And once I’ve done that then I work backwards.” Another administrator agreed that his management styles were the same in both situations. “I tend to be fairly laid back; laid back, but not unengaged, but laid back from a standpoint of not getting too excited. Not getting too down about things, but not getting too revved up about things either. I think in times of crisis, it’s important that you be able to keep a level head.” Another leader’s general management style is

goal-oriented, in that he has “a vision for what I feel a student affairs division should be like, given the culture of the particular institution where I might be working at the time, and fairly driven and fairly impatient about trying to move people, move the staff in a direction to best position the division to serve students in the best possible way in terms of enhancing the learning environment and the service environment for our students. In crisis situations again the first piece is really...wanting to find a way to end the crisis to seek resolution, and to do it in a way...that’s best for the students, that sets a precedent that can be lived with in the future, and that protects the institution and its integrity. Again I guess, pretty much goal-directed and probably in a hurry to try and get this thing off the front page [of the media].” The fourth administrator compared her daily leadership style to her crisis leadership style: “I don’t know that I’m a lot different in a crisis, I try to be a good listener, I try to prioritize in my mind what needs to be done...in a crisis, it’s very much a ‘mental going down the list’ to see if we’ve covered all these different angles, what have we missed, what haven’t we done, as much as we have done. I think I bring good questions to the crisis management team, and I don’t get too excited...I’ve always said that there are people that escalate a situation, and there are people who de-escalate a situation. And crisis management needs people who de-escalate who aren’t going to rev it up, and get others even more worked up.” The fifth administrator noted the similarities in his leadership styles between his daily routine and crisis response: “this is nothing that I learned or practiced but for whatever reason in a crisis, my mind isn’t going a hundred miles an hour...it’s just how I’m wired but my thinking doesn’t go crazy.”

*Different general leadership and crisis management styles.*

The sixth administrator acknowledged, “I’m probably a bit more forceful during a crisis, more direct than I am...you know, sometimes in a non-crisis situation, you want to let the people

that you're leading find themselves and find their way. I think in a crisis situation, it's incumbent upon the person who's responding or being seen as the principle responder to let everybody know somebody's in charge." The seventh administrator laughed when I asked if her styles were the same or different. "Yeah, I certainly think they are different because I direct two departments and so of course I have professional staff that I work with as colleagues and then support staff also... I am not a micromanager...I follow a collegial model with them and I think we work well together. I think when there is some type of crisis, though, that they look to me for the clear answer." Whether the administrators' general and crisis leadership styles were similar or different, each administrator was able to recognize his or her own leadership style in times of peace and in times of crisis.

*How has your crisis management style changed throughout your career? What differences exist between how you managed crisis events that occurred early in your career and those that occurred during the time you held a senior level student affairs administrative position?*

Every interviewee responded affirmatively that his or her crisis management styles have evolved throughout his or her career. One leader reflected, "well, I think I have a much bigger picture...I think when you are in a department, however small that department may be, or however big it is, that's your world, and so I had specific responsibilities...and I was just one small piece of a very large effort, I wasn't responsible for making sure every angle was covered. I know I needed to do my part really well, and I needed to be able to communicate to people what students needed and what families needed from the perspective of my role. Now, I'm more broad-minded, and I may have much less personal contact with a student or family in crisis; my role is different, I'm probably more about supporting our staff and making sure we have the right staff in the right places, informing the chancellor and the provost of what they need to know to make their decisions at that level." Keeping with the theme of specific roles, another

administrator said, “you know, early in my career my thinking was not about the larger institution as much as it was about my responsibilities within that bureaucracy...it wasn’t until I started working for a small private college...where I really started to learn how to focus on the entire institution as I made any decisions as I was working as Assistant Dean of Students then Dean of Students.”

Another administrator was very direct in answering this question: “experience and maturity allows you to react differently than you have reacted in your earlier years, and part of that is you realize that things are not usually as bad as they appear, or as good as they appear at other times. So you learn to accept the fact that you’re going to have times that are going to be very trying and very stressful, but in the big scheme of things, maybe they’re not that big.” A similar response from another administrator: “my maturation is a powerful tool. Of course, I’ve evolved over time, and I think just maturing as an individual as well as a professional in that you become far less reactionary...you know and understand that people are affected in so many ways...so I certainly hope that I have evolved over the years to a point where I understand the value of that and that I’m able to look at the things and analyze it in ways that I probably was not capable of doing in the early part of my career.” Another leader responded, “most things evolved and more experiences that you have, hopefully, you’re getting better, you know, hopefully you communicate better because that is certainly key, that all the players know what’s going on, and so I think experience really is a good teacher that we sort of know what to do in certain crisis situations.” Finally, the last response to this interview question revealed a unique answer: “I don’t think my spirit toward responding has changed, I think my methodology has changed because the university’s changed, were’ more into a FEMA model, particularly when it comes to natural disasters. We’ve got, I think, a more responsive university. We’re dealing with a different

public and a different student. The two things that I would say are constant, that haven't changed, are one, the spirit to do the right thing, and second, the willingness to use what authority and influence I have to get the right things done.”

The themes identified within the responses to this question include the differences in the roles of crisis response within different positions; entry level personnel usually handle very specific and focused tasks in crisis management, whereas senior level leaders must be able to understand and manage the large scale responses within crisis management. Another theme identified centered on the concept that previous experiences continually building to provide a basis of response for future crisis events, and that maturity and tenure within a position enables leaders to have a greater chance of successfully management a crisis than those without experience. Lastly, the idea was mentioned of responding to situations by focusing on keeping students' best interest in mind, no matter what the circumstances, that the well-being of the students is the litmus test by which all decisions are made.

### *Conclusion*

The University of Mississippi student affairs leaders I interviewed reported the types of crisis events they encountered both earlier and later in their careers and the tools which helped them develop their crisis leadership style. The collective and individual voices of these leaders provide thick and rich descriptions that directly append the qualitative research goal of discovering the factors that shape crisis management styles. Themes emerged from the data and were compiled within each interview question.

The final chapter provides an analysis, interpretation, and summary of the major themes that emerged from the interview data, and concludes with implications of this study and recommendations based on those conclusions.

## CHAPTER V

### Data Analysis and Conclusions

When I embarked on the journey to research the factors that shape and impact the crisis management styles of student affairs leaders, I knew that I would find some unexpected data along the way; however, I did not realize the magnitude and wealth of surprising information that would result from these interviews. I began this research with some idea of what I expected to hear in response to the eleven carefully selected research questions I asked each leader. Some of the responses I anticipated: that student deaths are some of the most traumatizing crisis events with which administrators must deal; that The University of Mississippi's culture, climate, and environment play a key role in managing crisis situations; and that as these leaders advanced through their careers and received more responsibilities, their crisis responses changed from when they first started out as a student affairs professional. In chapter four, I referenced all of the crisis events mentioned by the interviewees. Most of these responses fit within the framework of the three crisis categories defined by Zdziarski and his colleagues: environmental, facility, and human crises (Zdziarski et al., 2007). Some responses did not directly fit within those categories, but in order to keep the phenomenological method of research intact for this study, I allowed the interviewees to determine their own definition of the word "crisis" by purposefully omitting definition of terms during the interviews. This chapter presents the answers to the initial research questions and the implications and recommendations for future research.

## *Summary of Findings*

After reviewing the major themes that emerged from the data analysis, I was able to answer my research questions based on the analysis and comparison of data. This section provides the answers to each of these research questions as well as the supporting data by which I arrived at these answers. The data was generated from the interview response themes, cross-referenced by the administrators' professional vitas, and then compared to existing research.

*How did University of Mississippi senior level student affairs administrators (UM administrators) manage crisis situations that occurred early in their professional careers?*

I was able to answer this first research question after discovering a prevalent theme that emerged from the responses to the first three questions asked during the interviews. The roles and responsibilities included in each person's written job description did not necessarily match with the actual responsibilities supervisors expected from that person. Five out of seven administrators referenced the beginning of their career as a student affairs employee as a time of adaptation to situations of conflict and crisis. Each person was involved in crisis situations prior to receiving the advanced tools that they now possess as senior level administrators. Their roles in responding to and managing these initial crisis situations were unexpected; they were involved in tasks that they felt unprepared to manage, and reacted to the crisis situation by drawing from previous personal experiences, personal faith, and following the direction of senior level leaders.

*What notable crisis situations were UM administrators involved in throughout their careers? Why were these crisis situations notable?*

Quite simply, the overwhelming response to this question involved the death of students. Question four of the interview fleshed out the most vivid memories of crisis events for the respondents, and incidents involving student deaths came to mind almost every person. The nature of the death of students did not matter; students who were killed in automobile wrecks,

students who committed suicide, and students who victims of a natural disaster or a structural collapse were all mentioned as notable crisis events. Many of the administrators felt a sense of deep sympathy for the family and friends of the deceased students and the tone, gravity, and sincerity of each response conveyed the magnitude of impact that student deaths have on these administrators, both professionally and personally. Other notable crises were discussed, but the phrase “student deaths” was overwhelming present in the majority of responses. No other answer came close to matching the amount of discussion student deaths played in notable crises, from large scale tragedies like the Chi Omega walk and the Alpha Tau Omega house fire, to smaller scale tragedies such as an international student committing suicide or a fraternity hazing incident that resulted in a heartbreaking end of life.

*What factors contributed to the crisis management styles and decisions of UM administrators?*

After reviewing the entirety of the information presented in the interview transcriptions, specifically within questions five through nine, I concluded that although each student affairs administrator has a specific and personal set of factors that influence his or her crisis management style, commonalities definitely exist among these factors. The three most influencing factors on crisis management styles that emerged from this research include: previous experiences with crisis response and management (professionally and personally), professional training and education regarding protocols and procedures relating to crisis management, and institutional culture and environment of the place at which the crisis situation is being managed. “Regardless of the size of the institution or expectation of the constituencies, the impact of the institutional response over time is profound” (Zdziarski et al, 2007, p. 6).

Many responses from the seven administrators referred to their experiences with previous crisis events and how the management of those past events influenced their management of



future events. This “previous experience” factor in crisis management is supported by the “learning” phase of the Crisis Management Cycle developed by Zdziarski, Dunkel, and Rollo (2007). The five phases of the model are circular, beginning with planning, then prevention, response, recovery, and finally learning. Previous crisis experience is synonymous with the learning aspect of this model. A previous crisis “provides opportunities for us to learn from our successes and failures in responding adequately” (Zdziarski et al., 2007, p.49). The learning phase should include the a complete review by administrators, revisions to existing crisis management plans protocols, increased staff development, and debrief of crisis responders (Zdziarski, 2007).

The “professional training” factor in crisis management was a large theme throughout the responses of the administrators, and included on-campus workshops and mock-scenarios conducted by university personnel, written protocols and manuals adopted by university leaders, professional association conference presentations, web-based seminars, and consultant seminars hosted on campus. The majority of crisis training these administrators have received have been at conferences such as NASPA and ACPA. Several administrators admitted that written protocols often “get lost in the shuffle” and that stay “on my shelf”, but these administrators also revealed that mock-scenarios are more engaging and easier to remember. When asked the question about the types of crisis management training they have received, most of the administrators referred to dynamic, hands-on trainings they remembered over the years as student affairs professional. This response directly supports Jablonski, McClellan, and Zdziarski’s research that suggests “ongoing mock scenario training, not just protocols, is the key to effective crisis management” (Jablonski, McClellan, & Zdziarski II, 2008, p. 7).

The majority of the administrators referenced the “family culture” that exists at The University of Mississippi and the effect that culture has on the way they managed and continue to manage crisis incidents. The phrase, “Ole Miss is a family” and “there’s a family-feel here at Ole Miss” was heard throughout the interviews. This theme was not surprising to me in a general sense, but I did not realize the magnitude of pride and appreciation these administrators have for The University of Mississippi, even if they are not currently a member of the University’s payroll. The sense of closeness and support these administrators conveyed in the interviews about the institution exceeded the expectations I had before conducting the research. The respect the administrators have for members of the support staff and professionals within the Division of Student Affairs was apparent in each responder’s tone of voice and the amount of time they spent discussing these answers. One administrator said during the interview, “I have professional level staff that I work with as colleagues and then support staff also, who are looking to be directed, and so I am not a micromanager; my associates and assistants know that I trust them, definitely...and I think we work well together.” Steven Sample’s research on leadership and the relationship between administrators and staff supports the idea that institutional culture and environment impact decisions made by those in authority. “Indeed, throughout history the greatest leaders have been not the ones who operated high above their subordinates, but rather the ones who could identify and recruit the best talent and marshal it effectively under a guiding and unifying vision” (Sample, 2002, p. 122). The concept of administrators working closely with staff is an integral part of the culture at the University of Mississippi, and in turn, that environment is a chief factor in crisis management styles of those administrators. When administrators trust and respect their mid-level management and support personnel, their crisis management styles are influenced by those relationships. Zdziarski et al. (2007) found that “by



Each of the three administrators that acknowledged leading differently during crisis situations affirmed that they become more boss-centered and less democratic during times of crisis.

Tannenbaum and Schmidt discovered three main factors that influence how an administrator chooses to lead, and the definitions of these forces help explain how a senior level student affairs administrator may lead similarly or differently during times of calm versus times of crisis. Forces in the leader include the leader's value system, confidence, leadership inclinations, and feelings of security in uncertain situations. Forces in subordinates include the need for independence, readiness to assume responsibility, understanding of organizational or situational goals, and possession of knowledge needed to deal with the problem. Forces in the situation involve the type of organization, group effectiveness, the problem itself, and the pressure of time.

(Tannenbaum & Schmidt, 1958). Student affairs administrators evaluate (consciously or subconsciously) each of these three factors to arrive at the leadership style(s) they possess.

### *Implications for Practice*

I believe that the answers to the third and fourth research questions provide the most significance to the body of knowledge regarding crisis management and response. Higher education student affairs administrators must be able to identify the factors that influence the ways they make decisions so that they understand the reasons they responds to these crisis events. The importance of understanding personal factors of crisis management influence is evidenced in the idea that a leader must know himself or herself to improve; he or she cannot improve unless the foundation is understood. Part of that understanding is comparing general leadership with crisis leadership styles. Understanding the similarities and differences between the two modes of leadership helps administrators prepare themselves and their staffs for what to

expect in times of calm and in times of crisis. If a leader can communicate to colleagues and other student affairs personnel what to expect during a time of crisis, the response of those individuals will be far more organized, calm, and prepared. In his book, “Good to Great,” Jim Collins suggests that one of the differences between “good” managers and “great” managers is the idea of getting the right people for the job, then worrying about the vision of the organization. He illustrates his point by quoting great company leaders that said, “Look, I don’t really know where we should take this bus. But I know this much: if we get the right people on the bus,, the right people in the right seats, and the wrong people off the bus, then we’ll figure out how to take it someplace great.” (Collins, 2001, p. 41). Collins is stating that it’s not the goal that matters, but the person(s) who will be leading an organization toward that goal. If a student affairs administrator is willing to search and identify his or her leadership style, and make any necessary improvements or adjustments, he or she can be the right person in the right seat to drive the bus of higher education toward a better destination.

### *Future Research*

In the first question, I asked the seven leaders to tell me about the first crisis they had ever encountered as a student affairs employee. A theme that I did not expect to emerge became increasingly evident as I continued interviewing these leaders. Three of the seven respondents shared that their first crisis incident involved fraternity members in conflicts centered on racial tension. As I thought more about these responses and the timeline with the administrators’ vitas, I realized that the United States was transitioning from the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s into the following decades, a time during which many college age students, especially in the south, still clung to prejudice and bigotry. It would be interesting to conduct further research on this theme by interviewing current entry-level student affairs personnel at The University of

Mississippi about the first crisis they encountered and compare their answers to the responses found within this research paper. This future study would be significant to show the progression of crisis management spanning several decades of leadership, and determining the amount of racial reconciliation that The University of Mississippi has experienced to date.

I questioned whether or not to ask each interviewee to pre-define the term “crisis event” before the interview to guide their responses to fit within Zdziarski’s framework, but I did not want to diminish the spontaneity of their responses regarding crisis events by dwelling too much on the definition versus what immediately came to mind for them. However, in subsequent studies, if the researcher initially provides that framework to interviewees, it could force a more focused discussion pertaining to those three specific categories of crises.

Another question of interest involves one of the limitations of this research: that the responses to these interview questions are from the viewpoints of each administrator, but are not counterbalanced by responses from subordinates working under these administrators. Additional credibility would be added to this research if the same interview questions asked of each administrator were asked of other student affairs personnel who work closely with those administrators. The results of this additional research would provide a comparison between leadership style perceptions of leaders and subordinates that is relevant in leaders’ pursuit of personal and professional improvement. This research would either affirm or dispute the perception administrators’ have of their own leadership and management styles, both generally and during times of crisis.

### *Conclusion*

This research adds a unique element to the topic of crisis management in higher education. Previous research focused on the intervention and protocol components of crisis

management; I argue that defining the factors that influence an administrator's crisis management style is essential in building a foundation to improving protocol and intervention methods. Leaders must understand the reasons they respond to crisis situations in a certain way so that they understand the components that play an integral part in making decisions, and so they may use this foundation as a barometer by which they continue to grow and mature as leaders in higher education. Steven Sample said it best in his book, *The Contrarian's Guide to Leadership*: "The contrarian leader knows that he himself must answer the question of what's right from both a worldly and a moral perspective. This at times will make his experience more exhilarating than that of other leaders, and at times more excruciating. But it will always be his experience – one for which he willingly takes responsibility. And what could be a greater or more meaningful adventure in leadership than that?" (Sample, 2002, p. 192). Leaders within higher education are faced with tough decisions in crisis situations, decisions that can quickly become controversial as often crises situations lie within the gray areas of ethical and moral battlefields. Administrators who understand the factors that influence their own crisis management style will have a firm foundation on which to operate when (not if) times of crisis occur. Current research asserts "there is no substitute for a well-developed plan that can be used to train and inform staff of their roles and obligations in the event of a crisis" (Zdziarski et al., 2007, p. 329). I believe another component of crisis management is just as important: student affairs leaders must search introspectively to discover how previous crisis experiences, crisis training, and institutional culture influence their management styles. This phenomenological case study at The University of Mississippi serves as a tool to help facilitate this internal discussion for all student affairs administrators at all institutions of higher education.

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## List of Appendices

## Appendix: A

## Appendix A

### Individual Interview Protocol

Date : \_\_\_\_\_ Location: \_\_\_\_\_ Interviewee: \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewer Instructions: Give interviewee an overview of the research intentions and ask them to sign the IRB disclosure statement. Thank them for allowing the interview, and tell them that they should be comfortable at all times and may choose not to answer any given question(s). Inform them they will receive a written transcription before publication.

#### Interview Questions:

- 1) What was the first crisis you encountered as a student affairs professional?
- 2) What was your title at that time, and what was your role in this crisis response?
- 3) How did you “think, act, and feel” during this situation, and how did that process inform and shape your decisions in future crisis situations?
- 4) During your career, describe the notable crisis situations in which you were involved.
- 5) What did you learn from each of those notable crisis situations?
- 6) What was the environment and culture of the institution at the time each notable crisis occurred? How did that environment and culture impact the way you managed each of those notable situations?
- 7) What type of training have you had in crisis management or crisis intervention throughout your career?
- 8) What are the formal trainings you have attended either in person or electronically (such as conferences, seminars, and webinars)? How have those trainings impacted your crisis management style?
- 9) What manuals or protocols have you used in preparation for or management of crisis events? How helpful are those tools?
- 10) Please describe your general leadership and management style. How does your general management style compare with your crisis management style?
- 11) How has your crisis management style changed throughout your career? What differences exist between how you managed crisis events that occurred early in your career and those that occurred during the time you held a senior level student affairs administrative position?

## Appendix: B



## Appendix B

### **Administrator Vita Assessment**

Date : \_\_\_\_\_ Administrator: \_\_\_\_\_

Assessor Instructions: Collect a copy of most current vitae and answer questions below.

Vitae Assessment Questions:

- 1) What academic degrees are listed?
- 2) What higher education institution employers are listed?
- 3) What professional titles are listed?
- 4) What academic courses related to student affairs management are listed?
- 5) What length of time employed as a student affairs professional is listed?
- 6) What memberships to professional organizations are listed?
- 7) What conferences, workshops, or trainings pertaining to student affairs or crisis management are listed?
- 8) What other notable information is listed?

## Appendix: C

Appendix C

**IRB Interview & Vitae Collection Consent Form**  
**The University of Mississippi - Department of Leadership & Counselor Education**

Shannon B. Richardson - Graduate Researcher  
662-915-6736 shannonb@olemiss.edu

Lori Wolff, Ph.D., J.D. – Faculty Advisor  
662-915-5791 lawolff@olemiss.edu

**Greetings:**

I am a doctoral candidate within the Higher Education program at The University of Mississippi, and I am conducting interviews for my dissertation. The purpose of my research is to reveal the major factors that shape the crisis management styles of senior level student affairs administrators at The University of Mississippi. During this interview, you will be asked to answer some questions regarding your experiences and thoughts on campus crisis situations you have experienced and managed. This interview is designed to be approximately a half hour in length. However, please feel free to expand on the topic or talk about related ideas. Also, if there are any questions you would rather not answer or that you do not feel comfortable answering, please say so and we will stop the interview or move on to the next question, whichever you prefer.

**Participant's Agreement:**

I am aware that my participation in this interview is voluntary. I understand the intent and purpose of this research. If, for any reason, at any time, I wish to stop the interview, I may do so without having to give an explanation. I also understand that a copy of my vitae will be requested as part of the research data collection. I am aware the data will be used in a dissertation that will be publicly available at The University of Mississippi J.D. Williams Library. I have the right to review, comment on, and/or withdraw information prior to the dissertation's submission. The data gathered in this study are confidential with respect to my personal identity unless I specify otherwise. I understand that the interview session will be recorded with an audio recording device, and that if I say anything that I do not wish to remain on record, the interviewer will immediately rewind the tape and record over that information.

If I have any questions about this study, I am free to contact the student researcher or the faculty adviser (contact information given above). If I have any questions about my rights as a research participant, I am free to contact the IRB research compliance specialist: Diane Lindley (dlindley@olemiss.edu, 662-915-7482). I have been offered a copy of this consent form that I may keep for my own reference. I have read the above form and, with the understanding that I can withdraw at any time and for whatever reason, I consent to participate in today's interview.

Interviewee:

Interviewee Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date : \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewer: Shannon Richardson

Interviewer Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date : \_\_\_\_\_

## VITA

Shannon Baker Richardson was born in Columbia, South Carolina on January 24, 1979. Her educational background includes a Bachelor of Science degree in Exercise Physiology from North Georgia College & State University in 2001, a Master of Public Administration degree from Georgia State University in 2005, and a Doctor of Philosophy degree in Higher Education from The University of Mississippi in 2011.

Dr. Richardson began her career in higher education as an Assistant Director of Recreational Sports at North Georgia College & State University in 2001. She supervised the university wellness center, outdoor recreation program, intramural sports program and student development component of the department. In 2004, she accepted a position at The University of Mississippi, where she is currently the Assistant Director of Campus Recreation. Dr. Richardson oversees the outdoor recreation program, conducts departmental assessment research, coordinates departmental marketing, teaches several academic courses, and serves on various university committees. She lives in Oxford with her husband Hunter and daughter Emma.