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PERCEPTIONS OF ROLE CONFLICT AND ROLE AMBIGUITY AMONG FRATERNITY
AND SORORITY ADVISING PROFESSIONALS

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

By

ANTHONY E. VUKUSICH

May 2021

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ABSTRACT

Campus-based professionals in the area of Fraternity and Sorority Advising Programs (FSAP) have a known and documented high rate of attrition; more than half departing within the first five years of employment. Two recognized role stressors that are associated with high rates of turnover are role conflict and role ambiguity. Studies by Gold & Roth, 2013; Khan, Yusoff, Khan, Yasir, & Khan, 2014; Rizzo, House & Lirtzman, 1970; and Wolverton, Wolverton & Gmelch, 1999 have demonstrated that role conflict and role ambiguity are contributing factors in employee attrition across an array of industries and position types, including nurses, teachers, academic deans, and others in the United States and internationally.

A quantitative study with one qualitative question was conducted to better understand and interpret the perceptions held among FSAs with respect to role conflict and role ambiguity. The study was primarily performed utilizing the Role Conflict and Ambiguity Questionnaire (RCAQ) first developed by Rizzo, House, and Lirtzman (1970). Answers to supplemental questions regarding levels of satisfaction, and organizational commitment were also collected.

The findings from this study suggest that role stressors such as role conflict and role ambiguity play a factor in overall satisfaction and organizational commitment. Study results indicate a statistically significant correlation between role conflict, ambiguity, and satisfaction.

Grounded in research and best practices, this dissertation presents a tripartite approach to reducing role conflict and role ambiguity. As described in Manuscript III of this dissertation, is designed to decrease role stressors, amplify organizational commitment, and increase the self-

efficacy of FSAs thereby reducing attrition rates.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my family, a group of people united both by ancestry and by choice. They are the individuals who believed in me even when I doubted myself. Without their love and encouragement none of this would have been possible. My eternal gratitude goes to each of you for supporting me along this journey.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my Chair, Dr. Amy Wells Dolan for her guidance and support, as well as my committee members Drs. David Rock, Neal Hutchens, and K.B. Melear for their thoughtful commentary and feedback. I appreciate each of you and your contributions to my education.

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MANUSCRIPT I

PERCEPTIONS OF ROLE CONFLICT AND AMBIGUITY AMONG FRATERNITY &
SORORITY ADVISING PROFESSIONALS

Introduction

In 1926, at the behest of Intercollegiate Council on Personnel Methods, the American Council on Education: Committee on Personnel Methods embarked on a study that would endeavor to better understand the importance of the work of student affairs as a profession. Just over a decade later, the committee would publish its findings: *The Student Personnel Point of View* (American Council on Education, 1937). While student personnel work had long been a part of collegiate life at this point, the work was rapidly evolving, and this publication marked a watershed moment in the professionalization of what we know today as student affairs. In the less than a century since its emergence, the field of student affairs has transformed into a highly-specialized and complex profession with various branches focused on the diverse needs of college students (Astin, 1993).

Just as it was in 1926, today we must strive to better understand the contemporary challenges faced by those working within distinct functional areas in the field of student affairs. Student affairs is comprised of nearly every area outside of the classroom that impacts a student, from administrative supports to student services. Student affairs broadly includes areas such as residence life and student housing, campus and student activities, leadership development programs, admissions programs, career services and fraternity and sorority advising programs (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, 2009). The United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (2019) further elaborated, “Postsecondary education administrators oversee student services, academics, and faculty research at colleges and universities. Their job

duties vary depending on the area of the college they manage, such as admissions, student affairs, or the registrar's office.”

One matter that requires the attention of the field is the early attrition of student affairs practitioners. This phenomenon is well documented and broadly recognized as a problem of practice (Bender, 2009; Sandeen & Barr, 2006; Renn and Hodges, 2007). Renn and Hodges (2007) estimated that between fifty and sixty percent of higher education professionals would leave the field within the first five years of employment. However, there has been little inquiry into how this phenomenon impacts specific subfields within the profession.

One problem area inviting special attention regarding attrition is fraternity and sorority advising programs (FSAP). According to the data collected and published by the Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors (AFA) (2016), the average age of a professional in the field of fraternity and sorority advising is 32 years old. Additionally, nearly sixty percent of these professionals have 0 – 5 years of experience (p. 6). AFA (2016) further reported:

The youthfulness of professionals in fraternity/sorority affairs and the short amount of time they tend to be in their positions suggest both a tremendous influx of young professionals into the field as well as their swift exodus from the field after a short duration...Future research is needed to explore contributing factors to attrition in the field that they might be better understood and proactively addressed. (p. 6-8)

Role conflict and role ambiguity have long been recognized as contributing factors in employee attrition across an array of industries and position types, including nurses, teachers, academic deans, and others in the United States and internationally (Gold & Roth, 2013; Khan, Yusoffm Khan, Yasir & Khan, 2014; Rizzo, House & Lirtzman, 1970; Wolverton, Wolverton & Gmelch, 1999). The concepts of role conflict and role ambiguity are derived from role theory.

Role theory was first recognized in the 1930s by social scientists George Herbert Mead, Jacob L. Moreno, and Ralph Linton as a theory that behavior and social structures were connected by the *role* or *roles* a person fulfills (Biddle & Thomas, 1966). Role theory is often put into practice in various areas of academic study to better evaluate inter/intrapersonal interactions, expectations, and norms (Biddle, 1979).

For the purposes of this three-manuscript dissertation in practice (DiP) study, the researcher will explore perceptions of role conflict and role ambiguity as factors that may contribute to the high attrition rate and reduced job persistence among fraternity and sorority advising professionals, a group with demonstrated retention issues (Koepsell & Stillman, 2016). The first manuscript will identify the problem of practice, provide context and background necessary to understand the scope of the problem and explore the relevant data and literature surrounding it. The second manuscript will examine the perceptions of fraternity/sorority advising professionals in regards to role conflict and role ambiguity, constructs previously identified in the literature as having a negative correlation on job persistence in numerous scholarly publications across multiple fields of study (Gold & Roth, 2013; Khan, Yusoffm Khan, Yasir & Khan, 2014; Wolverton, Wolverton & Gmelch, 1999). The third will provide professional recommendations and explore the strategies and supports that may reduce role conflict and ambiguity among fraternity and sorority advising professionals. Recommendations for additional research will also be included.

To evaluate the perceptions surrounding role conflict and ambiguity, the researcher will utilize the Role Conflict and Ambiguity Questionnaire (RCAQ) originally developed by Rizzo, House, and Lirtzman (1970). The RCAQ, a validated survey instrument the researcher has been permitted to employ, will be used to determine the extent to which study participants experience

role conflict and role ambiguity. The RCAQ has been deployed across many industries to identify the extent to which individuals experience perceived role conflict and role ambiguity. Combined, these manuscripts will holistically explore role conflict and role ambiguity as it relates to the fraternity/sorority advisor (FSA) position, identify the extent to which FSAs experience role conflict and role ambiguity, and provide recommendations for future practice.

Background on Fraternity and Sorority Advising Programs

Fraternity and sorority advisor(s) (FSA) and fraternity and sorority advising programs (FSAP) have existed since the 1950s under various titles, departmental categories, and names. Advancement in FSA was brought on by the unprecedented growth of fraternal organizations in this time period, which resulted in institutions formally defining the relationship between local chapters, inter/national organizations, and the university (Jones-Hall, 2002, chapter 8). For the purposes of this study, the term fraternity and sorority advising professional(s) or fraternity and sorority advisor(s) (FSA) is meant to indicate professional campus-based administrators who have direct oversight of Greek-letter fraternities and sororities through departmental administration, otherwise known as fraternity and sorority advising programs (FSAP) as described by the Council for the Advancement of Standards (CAS) in Higher Education (2009). These professionals are known by various titles, Greek advisor, assistant director of fraternity and sorority life, director of fraternity and sorority life, and coordinator of fraternity and sorority affairs, to name a few.

From its onset, the role of FSA was complicated, often performed in conjunction with other administrative responsibilities. Binder (2002) noted that FSAP has more constituents than almost any other department in a division of student affairs. These constituents include but are not limited to students, parents, community members, faculty, inter/national offices, volunteers,

outside governance bodies (p. 2-3). Jones-Hall (2002) cautioned the FSA to be aware of both the various roles they fill and the power structures that exist both formally and informally (p. 5). This background lends context to the nature of the role that exists to this day. In some cases, fraternity and sorority advising may be a sole responsibility, or in selected circumstances advising may occur in addition to other collateral assignments like oversight of a housing complex or student organization registration. There is no specific credentialing or licensing process to become an FSA; however, a majority of institutions and the prevailing best practices consider a master's degree the minimum educational requirement. According to the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) (2009), "FSAP professional staff members must hold an earned graduate degree in a field relevant to the position they hold or must possess a relevant combination of educational credentials and related work experience" (p. 231).

A 2016 study by the Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors (AFA), an organization that educates and advocates for professionals in the fraternal industry, identified the retention problem and the overall youthfulness of the profession:

Younger members heavily populate the profession. For campus-based professionals, the average age is 32, with the most common age being 27...These figures suggest that many professionals leave the field after a brief tenure, as the data skews heavily to members in their late 20s and early 30s. (Koepsell & Stillman, 2016, p. 6)

To further recognize the demographics of the population, the study identifies that FSAs with membership in AFA are 59% female and 41% male. Racial identity demographics indicate that the membership is 73% white, 14% black, and 9% Latino/a.

Binder (2002) discussed the distinct position that most FSAs find themselves, underscoring that FSAP is one of the few remaining units within the institution that is holistic in nature. It is considered holistic because FSAs work with students starting with campus visits and new student orientation days, throughout membership recruitment and into their undergraduate career, and finally, as they transition to alumnus and often beyond as volunteers (p. 9).

The responsibilities of FSAs are directly linked to Greek community affiliation on their respective campus. As the number of members, chapters, and governing councils grow, so too do the responsibilities of the professional staff member. When data is compared over time, Greek letter organizations continue to experience growth in undergraduate membership according to data collected in 2012 by Hogan, Koepsell, and Eberly and in 2017 by the Fraternal Government Relations Coalition respectively. The 2012 data by Hogan, Koepsell, and Eberly reported that some 200 inter/national organizations sponsor approximately 9,000 chapters boasting more than 700,000 collegiate members. In 2017, the Fraternal Government Relations Coalition estimated membership to be nearly 800,000 undergraduates across 9,500 chapters. In *The American Freshman: National Norms 2016*, a national study conducted by Eagan, Stolzenberg, Zimmerman, Aragon, Whang Sayson & Rios-Aguilar of the Higher Education Research Institute at the University of California, Los Angeles, concluded that of “137,456 first-time, full-time students who entered 184 U.S. colleges and universities of varying selectivity and type in the fall of 2016” estimated that nearly 13% of the freshmen surveyed indicated that there was a very good chance that they would affiliate with a fraternity or sorority (p.27).

Definition of Terms.

Various terms used within this study are unique to the profession or theoretical framework and provide context to the problem of practice. Below are terms defined for the purposes of this study.

- Fraternity and Sorority Advising Programs (FSAP) – The collective oversight of Greek-letter organizations through advisement for individuals, organizations, and governing councils (CAS, 2009).
- Fraternity and Sorority Advisor / Fraternity and Sorority Advising Professional (FSA) – Campus-based administrators who have direct oversight of Greek-letter fraternities and sororities through departmental administration, otherwise known as fraternity and sorority advising programs (CAS, 2009).
- Role – “Those behaviors characteristic of one or more persons in a context” (Biddle, 1979, p.393).
- Role Theory – “A science concerned with the study of behaviors that are characteristic of persons within contexts and with various processes that presumably produce, explain or are affected by those behaviors” (Biddle, 1979, p. 394).
- Positional Role – “The behaviors that are characteristic of a social position” (Biddle, 1979, p. 392).
- Functional Role – “Behaviors that are involved in the accomplishment of a specific function” (Biddle, 1979, p. 388).
- Role Strain – “Experiences of stress associated with positions or expected roles” (Biddle, 1979, p. 394).
- Role Conflict – “Any condition of common or attributed polarized dissensus which poses problems for object persons” (Biddle, 1979, p. 394).

- Role Ambiguity – “An expected role is ambiguous when expectations within it are incomplete or insufficient to guide behavior” (Biddle, 1979, p. 393)

Identification of Problem of Practice (PoP)

For some time, the high turnover rate in fraternity/sorority advising programs has been recognized in this functional area within student affairs (Koepsell & Stillman, 2016). A vast majority of the research surrounding the high attrition rate has been focused on student affairs broadly. For example, Evans (1988), as well as, Richmond and Sherman (1991) provided insight regarding the high attrition rate in student affairs, outlining a lack of career advancement and mobility as a significant reason for departure. Given that little research exists related explicitly to the attrition rate in FSAP, it is essential to further study possible underlying causes to understand the issues and effect positive change on a potentially distressed functional area.

To better understand the reasons behind the attrition rate, it is necessary to engage in a study of the perceptions of these professionals. This study will involve current and former FSAs in regards to their professional experiences in FSAP.

Research Question

1. *Does role conflict and role ambiguity exist among fraternity/sorority advising professionals?*

The existence of role conflict and role ambiguity have a demonstrated relationship to one's intention to leave an organization as demonstrated in numerous studies (Chen, Rasdi, Ismail, & Asmuni, 2017; Guimaraes, 1997; Wolverton, Wolverton, & Gmelch, 1999). It is critical to determine if these conditions are experienced by a group with high levels of attrition. By answering this research question, the examiner strives to determine if role conflict and role

ambiguity exists within this specific group of practitioners and if so, provide recommendations that result in the reduction of role stressors experienced by professionals in fraternity and sorority advising which are grounded in research and supported by lived experiences.

Background on the Problem of Practice

FSAAs often find themselves in situations where the roles they play conflict with one another or with their own prescribed professional code of ethics. For example, FSAAs are tasked with providing individual support for the wellbeing of affiliated students in areas of personal and professional development, academic excellence, accountability, and areas of organizational management. In contrast, FSAAs are often tasked with disciplinary functions, interventions, and recommendations as to what chapters should remain on campus after an adverse incident occurs. Further, in some cases, though the FSA is an employee of the institution, their salary is not paid with institutional funds but instead by fees gathered by the fraternity and sorority governing councils on that specific campus. In this way, the sustainability of the office itself is wrapped up in the number of affiliated students and governing councils present on campus. These are examples of role conflict.

There are also examples of systemic role ambiguity within the FSA position. FSAAs are often evaluated on a moving target, or on factors that are primarily out of their control. For example, FSAAs are held responsible for the health of the community they support. That includes the academic performance of affiliated members, the number of organizational misconduct situations, the impact of educational and programmatic initiatives on issues like hazing and high-risk behaviors, and the number of members. This type of evaluation leaves the FSA with an ambiguous set of goals, given the ever-changing needs of students and the lack of authority assigned to the FSA.

In a study of role conflict and role ambiguity among academic deans Wolverton, Wolverton, and Gmelch (1999) identified a parallel situation, “On the one hand, deans may be asked to provide personal support for department chairs and on the other be required to evaluate them. This constitutes role conflict” (p. 82). Additionally, they outline the ambiguous nature of cost reductions year after year that becomes problematic to deans. Wolverton et al. (1999) described these type of tasks as "ambiguous, potentially arbitrary, and perhaps impossible to carry out."

Another parallel between FSA and academic deans is documented in the second edition of the text *The academic dean: Dove, dragon, and diplomat* (1991), in which authors Tucker and Bryan employ the metaphor that academic deans must simultaneously act as doves, dragons, and diplomats. As doves of peace, deans are charged with maintaining harmony among various constituents; as dragons, they must manage and mitigate the hazards that exist internally and externally; and finally, as diplomats, they must challenge and support those around them. Wolverton, Wolverton, and Gmelch (1999) used this description to demonstrate role ambiguity and role conflict among deans, “Each role-dove, dragon, or diplomat-is ripe with the possibility of conflicting expectations and ambiguous interpretations” (p. 82).

Similarly, this metaphor could be applied to the FSA role. The FSA must also act as a dove, dragon, and diplomat. As the dove of peace, the FSA must maintain harmony among chapters, councils, staff, and faculty whom all have an interest at stake within the institution. As dragon, the FSA must advocate for the rights of students while protecting the institutional reputation, mitigating and managing the hazards that exist both internally and externally. Finally, as diplomat, they must challenge the status quo within organizations and support students who are in various developmental stages.

As demonstrated, the academic dean and the FSA both hold roles that are faced with unpredictable and often unrealistic demands. The FSA experiences this from students, parents, the institution, and colleagues. However, by the nature of fraternal organizations, FSAs often face several other challenges that are not often considered. An FSA is not only responsible to the campus-based organizations along with their respective members and families, but they are also accountable to the inter/national entities, external volunteers, the umbrella governing councils, and the campus senior administration. Each group has different wants, needs, and expectations that are not always compatible.

Unlike academic deans, the FSA is often an entry-level position with high-level responsibilities. This is akin to placing relatively inexperienced teachers in high-risk schools. The National Partnership for Teaching in At-Risk Schools (NPTARS) published a report in 2005, outlining the need for experienced teachers in at-risk schools. NPTARS (2005) reported, "Experts from across the political spectrum increasingly have come to understand that a system in which teachers with the least experience are given the hardest teaching assignments is not serving the needs of students" (p. 3). The comparison between the staffing of FSAP and at-risk schools provides a unique parallel. NPTARS (2005) elaborated, "Even when qualified new teachers are hired, schools do not provide adequate support to help these teachers adjust, grow, and develop relationships with students who are often very different from themselves" (p. 8). The same concept can be applied to FSAP. FSAs are indeed leaving at a high rate, leaving relatively inexperienced professionals at the helm of a complex and high-risk functional area.

Further, research conducted in Texas outlined the stark difference an effective teacher can make. Jordan, Mendro, and Weerasinghe (1997) concluded, "[C]hildren assigned to effective teachers for three years in a row scored an average of 49 percentile points higher on a

standardized reading assessment than children assigned to three ineffective teachers in a row. NPTARS (2005) indicated that there is hope for improvement affirming, “States and districts are beginning to address the important role of the school environment in teacher retention and effectiveness, which is especially important for at-risk schools” (p.12).

Many similarities exist between these two professions and their respective environmental realities. In both cases, the need for seasoned leadership is evident. Doing less, in either case, puts the future of students in jeopardy by failing to meet their needs.

Fraternity and Sorority Advising Professionals

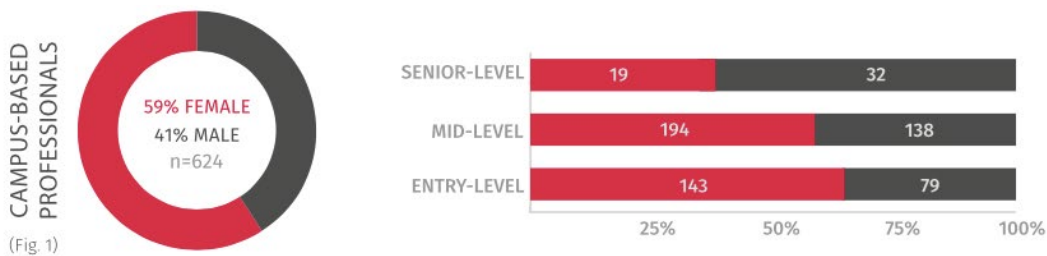
Understanding who the practitioners in the field of student affairs are is vital to understanding why they may choose to leave. Often, individuals who seek careers in higher education administration are described as idealists who enter the field to make a difference in the lives of students. These individuals also tend to value relationships, educational opportunity, and lifelong learning (Taub & McEwen, 2006). Over fifty percent of respondents to a 2006 survey by Taub and McEwen indicated that they value careers that “nurture the development of students” and have the “ability to continue learning in an educational environment” (p. 211).

It is recognized within the field that a significant portion, nearly 40%, of individuals attracted to careers in higher education, are so drawn because they feel their values align with those of practitioners who have served as role models (Hunter, 1992, p. 184). Research has demonstrated that many of the reasons that individuals enter the field of student affairs in the past may no longer exist. Bender (2009) expounded upon this idea, "Given the realities of contemporary higher education and the conditions which have presaged a troubled future, it is doubtful whether the motivations for pursuing a career in student affairs are in fact realistic" (Bender, 2009, p. 554). A culture that produces practitioners based on unrealistic expectations

without innovative action is destined for continued high rates of attrition and inconsistent support structures for students. Adequate practitioner preparation through graduate education, transition and support programs, and role realignment activities must occur in context with institutional mission. Sandeen and Barr (2006) underscored the rationale for new approaches; "It is unrealistic to expect young professionals to just accept working conditions that could be improved... To do less means that the profession will lose a number of promising professionals" (p. 88).

Within the profession of fraternity and sorority advising, the Association of Fraternity and Sorority Advisors represents 624 professionals who are considered campus-based (AFA, 2016, p. 4). While this does not represent all individuals working in the profession, it provides a robust view of those who work in this subset of student affairs.

Figure 1. Campus-Based Professional Position by Gender (AFA, 2016, p.4).



The Complex Role of the Fraternity & Sorority Advising Professional

Fraternity and sorority advising professionals hold complex positions on today's college campus. In many ways, these practitioners must oversee a small version of a complete student affairs division within their department. FSAs are tasked with managing relationships and interacting with affiliated students, parents, alumni, inter/national organizations, local and state governments, faculty, university administrators, and other student populations and groups. Additionally, FSA professionals often oversee human resource management, accounting, staff

recruitment, and assessment. There is also an expectation that fraternity and sorority advising professionals are responsible for significant oversight of individual affiliated students including crisis intervention, professional development, academic support, and much more (CAS, 2009, p. 229 – 236).

Hogan, Koepsell, & Eberly (2011) discussed this multifaceted environment:

These staff members often hold entry-level positions and work in one-person departments, yet they must support multiple levels of governance structure, oversee individual chapters, provide leadership training, manage campus-wide recruitment processes, support Greek-related honoraries, limit risk by monitoring events, and provide a comprehensive, timely response to incidents at any given moment. (p.13)

Additionally, CAS (2009) demonstrated that much of this work requires specialized knowledge in areas not only in student affairs but within other university departments and fields of study. CAS (2009) elaborated, "Effective management is critical to the success of the program, with expertise often required in the areas of housing, dining, accounting, safety and risk management, alumni relations, and programming" (p. 231). The various areas of oversight that have been noted each require a specific knowledge base and time constraints that could foster an environment where there are competing interests, implicit and explicit reporting lines, political pressures, and inevitably, dysfunction. The complexity of fraternity and sorority advising is further identified by the Association of Fraternity and Sorority Advisors' Core Competencies Manual (2018):

Fraternities and sororities are supported by a network of stakeholders whom each have their own authority, perspective, priorities, and interest in the community. Professionals who work with these organizations must take personal responsibility for working

collaboratively with each stakeholder group in order to capitalize on shared interests and navigate conflicting priorities. (p. 8)

Considering the definitions of role conflict and role ambiguity, these descriptions identify ways that both are ingrained in the job of the FSA.

One area that is often wrought with role conflict and role ambiguity for the FSA is governance or oversight. Each chapter operates differently and has different governance models, staffing and volunteer structures, and standards of conduct. Fussell (2002) described this phenomenon:

For some organizations, the governing authority rests in the elected volunteer leaders that serve terms of two years or more. Other organizations invest authority in the undergraduate body, which serves as the final arbiter of fraternity policy. Most all have boards of trustees that set the direction of the organization, leaving operations and administration to staff members. (AFA, Chapter 10)

When combined with university policies and procedures, governance of fraternal organizations can become a delicate balance. In a 2002 interview published in the *AFA Advising Manual*, Angela Guillory a recognized expert in the field of FSA elaborated, "Understanding the differences and respecting that each inter/national organization is a private organization, just like each university/campus has a differing philosophy, is the best way to be an effective advisor. Each group should be treated differently, if necessary." This example demonstrates one area in which ambiguity and conflict exist within the FSA role.

In recent years, a call to action was given to address how college campuses approach fraternity/sorority advising within the organizational structure. Kathy Cavins-Tull, Vice

Chancellor for Student Affairs at Texas Christian University and at the time the Chairperson for the NASPA: Fraternity and Sorority Knowledge Community, outlined the concept (2016):

Our staff members are burning out and getting out of Greek life as fast as they come in, and for those who want to build a career here, there are few pathways for advancement... We need to address our structures, relationships, and expectations and measure and report that which is important to student success.”

This call to action provides context for exploration of this problem of practice and lends a sense of urgency for senior student affairs officers to address the problem areas, relationships, and structures on their campuses.

According to the research described by Fried (2000), modern institutions of higher education will be forced to re-envision how they prepare and socialize campus professionals and refrain from practices that have become ineffective and status quo. These innovative practices include interdisciplinary understanding, as well as partnership models that enhance student capacity through active facilitation. In the *Handbook of Student Affairs Administration* (2000) Fried underscored this concept, “These strategies will stimulate the creation of institutional structures and processes that are more flexible, versatile, creative, fluid, and responsive to the complex challenges and issues that lie ahead” (p. 448).

Through this dissertation in practice, the researcher plans to expand the existing body of research by administering the Role Conflict and Ambiguity Questionnaire (RCAQ), a validated survey instrument, with professionals in fraternity and sorority advising, to gain perspective on their perceptions and experiences. This study utilizes role theory to frame the concept of student affairs attrition and will measure the extent to which current and former FSAs perceive they experience role conflict and role ambiguity within their work environment. Coupled with

existing literature, the results will be combined to provide a new viewpoint to this problem of practice and inform future decision-making that will improve the working environment of FSAs, thereby benefitting current and future students. Further, by better understanding the experiences of FSAs, there may be applicable findings that will inform the practice within a broader student affairs context.

Professional Positionality and Assumptions

Serving for over ten years in the fraternal industry, I felt the impact of high attrition rates in my work and on my students. In a time when news headlines are filled with high profile tragedies in fraternal organizations like the 2014 death of Marquise Braham (PennState), the 2017 death of Timothy Piazza (PennState), and the 2018 death of Max Gruver (Louisiana State University), as detailed by Rosenblatt (2018) for NBC News, I envision consistency and professionalism in FSAP as one step towards practical problem solving and positive change within the fraternal community.

Premature departure certainly detracts from efforts to rectify these dangerous situations happening on campuses and in Greek-letter organizations. Over the past ten years, I witnessed my colleagues leaving the profession at what felt to me like an alarming rate. Burnout appeared to have become the new normal. Anecdotally, I attributed this phenomenon to the strenuous work environment, as well as, perceived inequities in pay, the lack of career mobility, and difficulties with work-life balance. In one professional capacity, I witnessed a 200% turnover in staffing over three years. This experience and set of assumptions developed from professional practice have led me to research this problem to explore the situation more fully.

In this effort, I hope to move past surface-level symptoms and my personal assumptions to better identify the root causes of the high attrition rate in fraternity and sorority advising

programs. Additionally, I strive to provide real-life examples of the reasons why individuals stay or leave in order to address this problem of practice for the betterment of the profession and the benefit of students and institutions.

Assumptions

At the onset of this research, I subscribed to a set of professional assumptions regarding the high attrition in fraternity and sorority advising and student affairs that I wished to explore further. As previously stated, these assumptions included the strenuous work environment, perceived inequities in pay, the lack of career mobility, and difficulties with work-life balance. While those assumptions have in many ways been reinforced, additional information has been brought to my attention that warrants further study. Two such factors, role conflict and role ambiguity, are role stressors brought to the forefront during my research that have not been adequately explored as contributors to the attrition rate in fraternity and sorority advising programs.

Theoretical Framework

Role theory was introduced in the 1930s by social scientists George Herbert Mead, Jacob L. Moreno, and Ralph Linton. They theorized that *role* was a connection between behavior and social structure (Biddle & Thomas, 1966). Role theory is utilized in the areas of sociology, social psychology, anthropology, and organizational management, among others, to understand better how interactions, expectations, and norms are combined to inform an individual about how to conduct themselves. Roles are reported to be behavioral in nature, and they are performed by persons and allow for evaluation within specific contexts (Biddle, 1979).

Fellows and Kahn (2103) described, “Role theory is based on the concept that individual behavior in social settings is governed by perceptions of role, a socially constructed position, or

category, such as 'spouse' or 'manager'" (p.670). They go on to explain that role theory extends to all areas of life, including religion, family, politics, and even the management of organizations. Role theory identifies how we perceive ourselves within organizational contexts and the job that we have been assigned, including evaluation of performance and success.

A role is a construct built within the broader societal context. Fellows and Kahn (2013) outlined, "It is constructed in the sense that normative expectations specify a range of obligatory, acceptable, and prohibited conduct on the part of individuals inhabiting the role, otherwise known as actors" (p. 671). Roles are often categorized in two ways: positional roles and functional roles. Positional roles are those that can be seen on a job description or within an organizational chart. They encompass things like supervisory relationships and performance evaluations. Functional roles are those that arise from interaction with others and are not formally defined. Functional roles often arise out of necessity and can be based on perceived strengths and weaknesses. These may be derived out of the place an individual fills, or function in a group. For example, project leader, challenger, or expert (Fellows and Kahn, 2013).

Roles can often be wrought with challenges based on what is known as role expectations and may interfere with self-perception, as well as, personal and professional ideals creating what is known as role strain (Allen & van de Vliert, 1982). Fellows and Kahn (2013) explained, "*Role strain* occurs when various sets of expectations associated with the role interfere with one another" (p.672). Two prominent types of role strain that exist are role conflict and role ambiguity. Role conflict sometimes referred to as polarized dissensus, is described by Biddle (1979) as, "any condition of common or attributed polarized dissensus that poses problems for the object person" (p.196). Intra-role and inter-role conflict are also possible. This phenomenon takes place when differing expectations arise for a single role, or an individual fills two or more

roles in which the expectations conflict with one another, respectively (Biddle, 1979, p. 197).

Role ambiguity arises when there is a question about the authority an individual has to accomplish their role or when the measure of success within the role is unclear (Biddle, 1979, p. 198).

Theoretical Background

Role conflict and role ambiguity have long been recognized as barriers to success and longevity within an organization or position. Rizzo, House, and Lirtzman (1970) outlined the ramifications associated with role ambiguity, noting that individuals who experience this in the workplace will feel increasingly dissatisfied in their work. They described how this dissatisfaction manifests in the individual, "according to role theory, ambiguity should increase the probability that a person will be dissatisfied with his role, will experience anxiety, will distort reality, and will thus perform less effectively" (p. 151). Guimaraes (1997) and Chen, Rasdi, Ismail, and Asmuni (2017) reaffirmed that role ambiguity and role conflict are significant contributors to workplace dysfunction and inevitably have an impact on an individual's intent to leave an organization.

Role ambiguity has a direct impact on performance outcomes related to job expectations. Rizzo, House, and Lirtzman (1970) discussed, "If an employee does not know what he [or she] has the authority to decide, what he is expected to accomplish, and how he will be judged, he will hesitate to make decisions and will have to rely on a trial and error approach in meeting the expectations of his superior" (p. 151). Wolverson, Wolverson, and Gmelch (1999) studied the impact of role conflict and role ambiguity on academic deans, for example, finding that these role stressors had a significant impact on their job satisfaction. Wolverson et al. provided context about their study results,

Universities are notoriously vague about what it is they expect deans to do. They hire deans based on scholarly attributes and accomplishments and hope for administrative talent. Rarely do they set agendas, even initial ones, for new deans; instead, they let deans flounder around trying to determine in what direction their new charge should be headed (p. 101).

A study conducted by Chen, Rasdi, Ismail, and Asmuni (2017) found a significant negative correlation between role ambiguity and role conflict when compared to an employee's intention to stay at an organization (p. 75). Chen et al. (2017) indicated that role conflict and ambiguity were the "basis for a dysfunctional workplace" and that when combined, reduce an employee's desire to persist. In their study, they found a negative and moderate correlation ($r = -.487$) between role conflict and intention to stay. Further, the researchers found a negative and moderate relationship between role ambiguity and intention to stay (Chen et al., 2017, p. 75).

Individuals face many role stressors within any workplace context. It is understood, however, that role ambiguity is more harmful than most others due to its relationship with performance indicators (Kauppila, 2014, p. 740). Student affairs professionals, including those in FSAP, experience these stressors related to role conflict and ambiguity. In a study related to the experiences of mid-career student affairs professionals, Houdyshell (2007) reported, "Participants often described the dualistic existence of performing entry-level tasks combined with higher-level responsibilities and expectations, as a confusing place to reside in their professional careers" (p. 193). This conflict regarding role is an example of the confusion that takes place among student affairs professionals and can lead to intent to leave the profession.

Role Expectations and Clarity

Role expectations are a set of norms that are developed for an actor given the specific role that they fulfill. Allen and van de Vliert (1982) explained, "Role expectations are prescriptions about what a position incumbent ought to do or not do under given circumstances" (p.4). Various individuals and groups can set role expectations. For example, a supervisor may have a set of expectations, both implicit and explicit in which they expect an employee to subscribe. The individual may have role expectations for him/herself. Additionally, colleagues, constituents, and subordinates may have a different or conflicting set of role expectations. In these instances, clarity becomes important to execute any given set of expectations effectively (Allen & van de Vliert, 1982).

Role clarity through a solidified set of expectations is critical in the increasingly complex environments within fraternity and sorority advising. Kaupplia (2014) discussed how complex environments could harm role clarity. The author explained, "This phenomenon is likely to be harmful to organizations because, without clear roles, employees are unlikely to identify with their organization and its goals" (p. 737). When an employee is not invested in the organization and its goals due to a lack of role specificity, negative viewpoints regarding the value of work within an institutional setting and actions that may be inconsistent with stated goals and desired outcomes may develop. In this scenario, self-imposed expectations as well as expectations set by supervisors can be negatively impacted. Allen and van de Vliert (1982) provided the example, "If a football coach does not communicate clearly his role expectations to the quarterback or if the latter's perceptions of the role expectations are distorted, then the resulting role behavior will be discrepant with role expectations" (p.5). This example highlights the importance of clarity between expectations set by external forces, as well as self-imposed role expectations and that expectations can be received and distorted or misconstrued.

Contextualization of Problem of Practice

Administration in higher education has advanced in the twentieth century as colleges and universities have grown in both student populations, as well as the array of student-focused services and resources they provide. CAS (2009) outlined this evolution:

During the twentieth century, college and university student support programs evolved from a few faculty assigned part-time to attend to students' needs beyond the classroom to the establishment of institutional divisions designed to complement the educational goals of academic affairs. (p. 8)

Student affairs administrators themselves tend to be highly educated, holding advanced degrees, with specialized knowledge (CAS, 2009 & United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019).

These practitioner-educators are responsible for many areas within the academy. In the first quarter, 2017, there were nearly 4 million jobs in the higher education sector, across public and private institutions, representing 2.67% of all jobs in the United States (HigherEdJobs, 2017).

HigherEdJobs (2017), reported, "The number of jobs in higher education increased 0.6 percent, or 22,100 jobs, during the first quarter of 2017. At the time, this was the largest first-quarter increase in higher education jobs since Q1 2012." (HigherEdJobs, 2017). Nearly 76%, roughly 16,800 of these jobs were considered administrative or executive (HigherEdJobs, 2017).

According to the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (2019), employment in the higher education jobs market is projected to grow by 7% from 2018 to 2028. This growth is above average for all occupations.

Coupling the anticipated growth with the highly-specialized knowledge required to facilitate a fraternity and sorority advising program, and the high-profile and sometimes tragic events that take place we must consider how to recruit and retain the best and brightest talent to

fill what could become a significant leadership gap. As evidenced by the data presented by the Association of Fraternity Advisors (AFA) (2016), the profession is overwhelmingly staffed by individuals with zero to five years of experience. Considering the complexity of the profession and the high-level concerns taking place such as hazing, drug and alcohol abuse, and mental health concerns, there is reason to speculate that the existing staffing approach may need to be revised.

Evolution of Fraternity and Sorority Advising Profession

In large part, the field of student affairs evolved out of a position that began in the late 1890s following the inclusion of women in higher education (Wells Dolan & Kaiser p. 232). Deans of women were needed to support the educational, personal, and social affairs of admitted young women. The need for additional services and support mechanisms grew with the populations colleges and universities served. Wells Dolan and Kaiser (2015) elaborated, "The need for student space and for activities outside of the classroom was a major contribution to American collegiate student life" (p.232). Out of these needs emerged a field that today is highly specialized. In the 1980s, fraternity and sorority advising programs were officially recognized as a specialized area (CAS, 2016).

The evolution of FSAP as a profession remains mostly undocumented. We do, however, have some data related to the organizational development that provides essential context. The first Greek-letter fraternity, Phi Beta Kappa, was founded in 1776 at the College of William and Mary. Phi Beta Kappa would later go on to expand at campuses like Dartmouth, Harvard, and Yale in the 1800s. Today Phi Beta Kappa exists as an academic honorary society (Turk, 2004).

Most fraternal organizations existed as secret societies, and many flourished during the 1800s despite the hostility and distrust of faculty (Turk, 2004). Alpha Delta Pi established at

Wesleyan Female College in 1851, as the Adelphean Society, was the first secret society for women (Alpha Delta Pi, n.d.). Throughout the 1900s, activity related to fraternal organizations was abundant. The National Panhellenic Conference (NPC), established in 1902 as the Interfraternity Conference, marked a watershed moment in the solidification of the governance of fraternal organizations that we see today (National Panhellenic Conference, 2018).

In 1906, the first Greek Letter fraternity for African-American men was founded at Cornell University (Alpha Phi Alpha, 2018). Alpha Kappa Alpha, the first Greek-letter sorority for African-American women, was founded at Howard University in 1908 (Alpha Kappa Alpha, 2018). The North-American Interfraternity Conference (NIC) was founded soon after in 1909, and currently serves as a trade association for men's fraternities (North-American Interfraternity Conference, 2018). In 1930, the National Pan-Hellenic Council originally came together to serve as a collective resource for what would eventually become the nine historically African-American member organizations (National Pan-Hellenic Council, 2018).

Organizations developed to support professionals in student affairs bourgeoned as well. In 1930, the Fraternity Executives Association (FEA) was formed, developing programs like the Interfraternity Institute (IFI). IFI is a collaborative designed to facilitate dialogue between campus-based and organization-based professionals; IFI continues today (FEA, 2015). In the 1950s, the campus-based professionals became part of the landscape to support the exploding population of affiliated students (Jones-Hall, 2002). In 1976, the need for an organization that supported campus-based professionals, and provided professional development opportunities was identified, and the Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors was born (AFA, 2010). Today, AFA is the preeminent professional association for FSAs. In 1986, the Council for the

Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) included FSAP as a functional area and published the Greek Advisors Manual (CAS, 2016).

Today, organizations that support members, professionals, and Greek letter fraternities and sororities are widespread. In 2019, the Timothy J. Piazza Center for Fraternity and Sorority Research and Reform, commonly known as the Piazza Center, was established at Pennsylvania State University. The Piazza Center builds upon the legacy of the Center for Fraternity and Sorority Research initially established in 1979 at Indiana University (PennState News, 2019).

Fraternities and sororities represent various racial and cultural identities, serve as facilitators of personal growth, and provide professional learning opportunities. The University Learning Outcomes Assessment, or UniLOA for short, developed by Frederick and Barratt (2007) reported in a 2010 interview that the fraternal experience facilitated growth in critical areas of student learning. They concluded, "This spike [in student learning growth] occurs when individuals first join the fraternity and continues to build cumulatively throughout their time in college" (Meyer, 2010). They also indicated that this growth was particular to the fraternal experience. Frederick and Barratt elaborated on their findings:

The research shows significant advantages that are specific to the fraternity experience. Some of the most dramatic areas of difference are found in leadership and community involvement. Fraternity men scored higher, and experienced higher net gains in growth over their academic lifespan, than the national mean of all students in each of the seven areas measured. (Meyer, 2010)

While this overview provides context to the evolution and profession, data related to the professionalization of FSAP at the campus level is sparse.

Previous Research

Renn and Hodges (2007) revealed that somewhere between 50 and 60 percent of higher education professionals would leave the field within the first five years of employment. They also echoed the need for a better understanding of existing organizational culture and climate as they relate to the dynamics that make the field challenging to navigate (p. 370). Further, Bender (2009) added a layer of complexity to this attrition explaining that a large percentage of campus-based professionals find themselves feeling that their role is not viewed as essential to the mission of the institution resulting in dissatisfaction and reduced persistence among professionals (p. 564).

The Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors (2016) indicated that these high attrition rates extend to practitioners in fraternity and sorority advising programs and may exceed the norms at the umbrella student affairs level (p. 6-8). They indicated, “These figures suggest that many professionals leave the field after a brief tenure...we find an oversaturation of young professionals in AFA – 57% for members with 0-5 years’ experience” (p. 6).

Method

This study will seek to engage a national audience in order to understand the experiences of FSAs better. The researcher plans to survey current and former FSAs in regards to their perceptions of role conflict and role ambiguity in their work. To recruit fraternity and sorority advisor participants, the researcher will utilize the Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors in order to be included in outgoing communications to campus-based professionals. Additionally, the researcher will utilize the social media group hosted by the NASPA Fraternity and Sorority Knowledge Community to promote participation in the study. Both the AFA group and the NASPA group are likely to include both current and former FSAs in their audiences. To

streamline involvement, the researcher will utilize an electronic program, Qualtrics, to implement the instrument and collect respondent data.

The instrument chosen to evaluate the experiences and perceptions of role conflict and role ambiguity among FSAs is the Role Conflict and Ambiguity Questionnaire (RCAQ). The RCAQ is a psychometrically verified quantitative survey utilizing a Likert scale that measures the perception of role conflict and role ambiguity in the participant's environment. The seven-point scale ranges from very false (1) to very true (7). Additionally, participants will complete a demographic and informational questionnaire that will provide data points that can be used to compare against RCAQ results (See Appendix A).

Methodology

The researcher selected the RCAQ because of its demonstrated reliability over time. A review of previous studies and literature demonstrates that the RCAQ scales produce reliable and valid results in differing work settings across many cultures, including within the United States, Europe, China, and Pakistan. For example, teachers in the United States, university deans in the United States, nurses in China, and university teachers in Pakistan (Conley & Woosley, 2000; Khan, Yusoffm Khan, Yasir & Khan, 2014; Lawrence & Kacmas, 2012; Wolverton, Wolverton, Gmelch, 1999; Wu & Norman, 2006).

Population and Analysis

According to data released by AFA (2016), the Association represents 624 of some 800 campus-based professionals. The researcher strives to recruit a representative sample of approximately seventy participants in order to have robust results. In the 1999 study by Wolverton, Wolverton, and Gmelch, the psychometric validity of Rizzo et al.'s (1970) RCAQ scales were reverified by conducting principal component analysis. Wolverton et al. confirmed

their validity, "As expected, the first eight statements loaded on the role conflict factor and the remaining statements loaded on the role ambiguity factor. The reliability coefficients for role conflict and role ambiguity were $\alpha = 0.83$ and $\alpha = 0.86$, respectively" (p. 85). Various studies including that of Wolverton et al. (1999) have confirmed the stability and reliability of the concepts (Kelloway & Barling, 1990; King & King, 1990; Netermeyer, Johnson, & Burton, 1990; Smith, Tisak, & Schmieder, 1993; Wolverton, Wolverton, & Gmelch, 1999).

Taking into consideration the various other studies that have analyzed and validated the constructs, the researcher will use descriptive statistics and statistical analysis to scrutinize and describe the data collected from the RCAQ and informational portions of the study. The researcher will examine the responses from the two groups, current and former FSAs, to determine the level of perceived role conflict and role ambiguity. As suggested by Rizzo, House, and Lirtzman (1970), role ambiguity items will be reverse scored due to the positive nature in their phrasing. Additionally, the researcher will analyze the difference between the two sample groups' perceptions of role conflict and role ambiguity. The researcher will also analyze the relationship between the perceptions of the role constructs and demographic variables. The researcher will apply t-tests and Pearson's Correlation Coefficients to analyze the responses. Further, two-way analysis of variance will be used to simultaneously test the effect of two independent variables (current or former and age, tenure, etc) on a dependent variable (perception of role) (Hinkle, Wiersma, & Jurs, 2003, p. 402).

Rizzo, House, and Lirtzman (1970) described the RCAQ study as "factorially independent scales designed to measure role conflict and ambiguity in complex organizations" (p. 150). The descriptive and statistical data collected and analyzed from the implementation of the survey will be combined with research on role conflict and ambiguity, best practices, and

existing data regarding the attrition rate in FSAP and student affairs to create recommendations for future decision-making.

Issues Surrounding Equity, Ethics, and Social Justice

Given the complexity of the role, there are issues surrounding equity, ethics, and social justice that arise from the high attrition rate of FSAs. In the text, *Professional Competency Areas for Student Affairs Educators*, ACPA and NASPA (2015) highlight the importance of social justice as an area of proficiency. The organizational collective outlined in their report, “Social justice is defined as both a process and a goal that includes the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to create learning environments that foster equitable participation of all groups and seeks to address issues of oppression, privilege, and power” (p.30). To this end, fraternity and sorority advisors have a vital role to play in advancing issues of equity, ethics, and social justice in higher education. These efforts can suffer or stall out when professionals depart their jobs.

To ensure a high level of ethical conduct, the Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors published a code of ethics to assure the public and constituents that the duties of the FSA would be carried out with integrity. AFA (n.d.) identified:

As a member of the Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors, I personally commit myself to these provisions and will be ever mindful of the importance of acting on these ethical principles during my daily practice as a student affairs professional. I promise to maintain the highest standard of personal conduct; actively promote and encourage the highest level of ethics within the profession and my institution or organization; maintain loyalty to the institution that employs me and pursue its objectives in ways that are consistent with the public interest; recognize and discharge my responsibility and that of

my institution or organization to uphold all laws and regulations relating to my institution's or organization's policies and activities; strive for excellence in all aspects of management and leadership of my institution or organization; use only legal and ethical means in all of my institution or organization's activities; serve all members of my institution impartially. Maintain the confidentiality of privileged information entrusted or known to me by virtue of my position; refuse to engage in, or countenance, discrimination on the basis of race, sex, age, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, or disability; always communicate the institution's internal and external statements in a truthful and accurate manner by assuring that there is integrity in the data and information used by my institution or organization; cooperate in every reasonable and proper way with other fraternity advisors, and work with them in the advancement of the profession of fraternity advising; Use every opportunity to improve public understanding of the role of fraternity advising.

Evidenced by the multiple organizations contributing statements regarding equity, ethics, and social justice, there is a concerted effort to ensure their place in FSAP.

As an integral part of a comprehensive student support network, the FSA plays a crucial role in ensuring that the Greek letter community enhances the mission of the host institution. Further, one essential component of the role of the FSA is to ensure equity and access in their programs. CAS (2009) described, "Fraternity and Sorority Advising Programs (FSAP) must be provided on a fair, equitable, and non-discriminatory basis...FSAP must maintain an educational and work environment free from discrimination in accordance with law and institutional policy" (p. 233).

Additionally, high attrition rates are not merely problematic due to the loss of a staff member or even because of the amount of work and money that it takes to replace an employee. There are many costs, tangible and intangible, that are incurred by institutions due to this phenomenon. In a 2016 study regarding attrition rates in student affairs Marshall, Moore Gardner, Hughes, and Lowery discussed, "The expenditures associated with employee turnover, such as recruiting, hiring, and training during a transition, are but a few of the costs associated with attrition (p. 146). They went on to note that "financial and productivity losses experienced during employee transitions are significant and may disrupt the creation and sustainability of a positive and productive campus culture." We have an ethical imperative to limit the damage done by the high attrition rates found in the student affairs arena. Rosser and Javinar (2003) also relayed that departments that face high attrition rates "lose efficiency, consistency, and quality in the delivery of services, as well as the investment made in the knowledge base of the institution or unit" (p. 825).

The role of the FSA extends beyond the normal boundaries of providing oversight to a student group or to developing effective management practices with student leaders. In many ways, practitioners in this area must develop personal relationships with individuals from diverse backgrounds and points of view in order to influence positive change in challenged organizations. In this way, professionals advising affiliated students in Greek-letter organizations have a responsibility to show an ethic of care and demonstrate authentic leadership. Atwijuka and Caldwell (2017) described the importance of the Ethic of Care (EoC), "The EoC and its focus on caring, honoring relationships, and emphasizing the importance of people rather than rules can be a useful, ethical perspective for leaders to understand as they reflect on how to become more authentic, more trusted, and more effective" (p. 1047). However, given the high

attrition rate, that ethic of care may not be fulfilled, and personal relationships might not be developed or ended prematurely.

Often, issues of equity in the workplace arise when salary comparisons are taken into consideration. Arguably, fraternity and sorority advising professionals are tasked with high-level administrative functions while being compensated at a low level. Perceived inequity among professionals in student affairs contributes to low morale. According to data released by The College and University Professional Association for Human Resources in their 2016-17 *Administrators in Higher Education Salaries Survey*, a discrepancy exists among administrators. For example, the average salary of a chief Greek affairs professional is \$57,044; compared to the chief student activities administrator with an average of \$65,000 and the chief student housing administrator at \$75,383. Additionally, the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (2019) stated that the lowest ten percent of postsecondary education administrators earned less than \$54,680, a statistic that indicates that many chief FSAs reside near or within the bottom ten percent of all administrator salaries. Given this inequity, and factoring in that the same level of educational attainment is cited as essential, it seems important to take note.

Fraternity and sorority advising professionals tend to be a highly-educated group of individuals with a majority holding master's or doctoral level degrees. According to data released by AFA (2016), "87% of campus-based professionals have earned a master's degree. Including doctorates, that percentage rises to 94%" (p. 9). AFA (2016) elaborated, "For campus-based professionals, given the vast majority that have a master's degree, the data seems to indicate no relationship between educational attainment and salary range with the marginal exception of doctorates, which exhibit a preponderance in the highest income bracket" (p. 9). This data suggests that because of the high number of FSAs with an earned master's degree,

there is little demonstrated connection between salary level and education with the caveat that individuals with a doctorate tend to report the highest salary.

Given the low number of senior-level positions within fraternity and sorority advising, it is clear that few options exist for increased earnings or career advancement. AFA (2016) elaborated, "Given the paucity of senior-level positions, lower- and mid-level professionals who want to increase their salary seem to be left with little recourse but to leave Fraternity/Sorority Life in favor of better opportunities in higher education or elsewhere" (p.9).

The attrition rate within FSAP is complex and addressing it is critical to the continued success of this robust and historical component of campus life. As previously discussed, a call to action has been given, and it is the goal of this researcher to respond to that call with data that will inform decisions regarding the future role of the FSA. As outlined by Kathy Cavins-Tull (2016), "We need to address our structures, relationships, and expectations and measure and report that which is important to student success." I plan to do this by answering the question: 1. *Does role conflict and role ambiguity exist among fraternity/sorority advising professionals?* Further, I plan to explore the strategies and supports that may reduce role conflict and ambiguity among fraternity and sorority advising professionals as a best practice.

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APPENDIX

Appendix

Role Conflict and Role Ambiguity Questionnaire (RCAQ) and Demographic Survey

Perceptions of Role Conflict and Role Ambiguity Among Fraternity and Sorority Advising Professionals

Start of Block: SURVEY INSTRUCTION

Q1 *By participating in this survey, I certify that I am 18 years of age or older.* **Description**

The purpose of this research project is to determine the extent to which participants experience role conflict and role ambiguity in their work. I would like to ask you a few questions utilizing the Role Conflict and Ambiguity Questionnaire (RCAQ). You will not be asked to provide any identifying information beyond basic personal contact information and demographic information. Your responses will remain confidential. **Participant and Time Expectations** You will be asked to respond to an online demographic questionnaire and a 14-question inventory, this should take an estimated 10 minutes. **Requirements** You must be 18 years of age or older and a current or former fraternity and sorority advising professional employed full-time at an institution of higher education (college/university) in a direct Fraternity/Sorority Advising position. TO READ MORE INFORMATION ON THIS STUDY CLICK [HERE](#)

End of Block: SURVEY INSTRUCTION

Start of Block: Informed Consent

Q2

Welcome to the research study!

We are interested in understanding the experiences and perceptions of role conflict and role ambiguity among fraternity and sorority advising professionals. You will be presented with information relevant to role conflict and ambiguity and asked to answer some questions about it. Please be assured that your responses will be kept confidential.

The study should take you an estimated ten minutes to complete, and you will receive no incentive for your participation. Your participation in this research is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at any point during the study, for any reason, and without any prejudice. If you would like to contact the Principal Investigator in the study to discuss this research, please email aev@go.olemiss.edu.

By clicking the button below, you acknowledge that your participation in the study is voluntary, you are 18 years of age, and that you are aware that you may choose to terminate your participation in the study at any time and for any reason.

Please note that this survey will be best displayed on a laptop or desktop computer. Some features may be less compatible for use on a mobile device.

Q3

Do you consent to participate in this study?

- I consent, begin the study
- I do not consent, I do not wish to participate

Skip To: End of Survey If Q3 = I do not consent, I do not wish to participate

Page Break

End of Block: Informed Consent

Start of Block: Professional Information

Q4 What is/was your job title as a fraternity/sorority advisor?

Q5 Which of the following best describes your tenure as a fraternity/sorority advising professional?

- Less than 1 year
 - 1-2 years
 - 3-4 years
 - 5 or more years
-

Q6 How many professional full-time equivalent staff members are/were in your functional area including yourself?

- 1
 - 2
 - 3
 - 4
 - 5
 - 6
 - 7
 - 8
 - 9+
-

Q7 Do you have other collateral assignments outside of fraternity/sorority advising?

▼ Yes ... No



Q8 On average how many hours do you work in a typical week as a fraternity/sorority advisor?

Q9 How many students are involved in your most recent Fraternity/Sorority community?



Q10 How many total fraternity/sorority chapters do you oversee?



Q11 Please indicate the number of governing councils represented on your campus.

End of Block: Professional Information

Start of Block: Institutional Information - based on Carnegie Classifications

Q12 Please indicate the number of full-time equivalent students at your institution.

- less than 1,000
- 1,000 to 2,999
- 3,000 to 9,999
- 10,000 +

Q13 Please indicate your institution's geographic location.

- Northeast
- Southeast
- Midwest
- Southwest
- Western

Q14 Please identify your institution type.

- Public
- Private

End of Block: Institutional Information - based on Carnegie Classifications

Start of Block: RCAQ

Q15 Please respond to the statements below, indicating their accuracy on a scale from 1 (very false) to 7 (very true).

I work with two or more groups who operate quite differently.	▼ 1 Very False ... 7 Very True
I do things that are apt to be accepted by one person and not accepted by others.	▼ 1 Very False ... 7 Very True
I receive an assignment without the proper resources and materials to execute it.	▼ 1 Very False ... 7 Very True
I receive an assignment without the proper staffing to complete it.	▼ 1 Very False ... 7 Very True
I have to do things that should be done differently.	▼ 1 Very False ... 7 Very True
I have to work on unnecessary things.	▼ 1 Very False ... 7 Very True
I receive incompatible requests from two or more people.	▼ 1 Very False ... 7 Very True
I have to buck a rule or policy in order to carry out an assignment.	▼ 1 Very False ... 7 Very True

Q16 Please respond to the statements below, indicating their accuracy on a scale from 1 (very false) to 7 (very true).

I know what my responsibilities are.	▼ 1 Very False ... 7 Very True
I feel certain about how much authority I have.	▼ 1 Very False ... 7 Very True
I know exactly what is expected of me.	▼ 1 Very False ... 7 Very True
Explanation is clear regarding what has to be done.	▼ 1 Very False ... 7 Very True
Clear planned goals exist for my job.	▼ 1 Very False ... 7 Very True
I know that I have divided my time properly.	▼ 1 Very False ... 7 Very True

End of Block: RCAQ

Start of Block: Personal Perceptions

Q17 Please briefly describe your working environment as a fraternity/sorority advisor.

Q18 Have you left your position as a fraternity/sorority advising professional?

- Yes, I have already left.
- No, I am a current fraternity/sorority advising professional
-

Display This Question:

If Q18 = No, I am a current fraternity/sorority advising professional

Q19 Have you ever considered leaving your position as a fraternity/sorority advisor due to work-related stressors?

- Yes
 - No
 - Unsure
-

Display This Question:

If Q18 = No, I am a current fraternity/sorority advising professional

Q20 Do you plan to leave your position as a fraternity/sorority advisor in the next 6 months due to work-related stressors?

- Yes
 - No
 - Not Applicable
-

Q21 Considering your current or most recent fraternity/sorority advising role, please rank your level of satisfaction on a scale of 1 (low) to 7 (high) for the following statement:

Clarify of role	▼ 7 Extremely satisfied ... 1 Extremely dissatisfied
Work load	▼ 7 Extremely satisfied ... 1 Extremely dissatisfied
Level of compensation	▼ 7 Extremely satisfied ... 1 Extremely dissatisfied
Support from supervisor	▼ 7 Extremely satisfied ... 1 Extremely dissatisfied
Opportunities for growth	▼ 7 Extremely satisfied ... 1 Extremely dissatisfied
Overall satisfaction	▼ 7 Extremely satisfied ... 1 Extremely dissatisfied

End of Block: Personal Perceptions

Start of Block: Demographics



Q22 What is your current age?

Q23 What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?

- Less than high school degree
 - High school graduate (high school diploma or equivalent including GED)
 - Some college but no degree
 - Associate degree in college (2-year)
 - Bachelor's degree in college (4-year)
 - Master's degree
 - Doctoral degree
 - Other _____
-

Display This Question:

If Q23 = Master's degree

Or Q23 = Doctoral degree

Q24 What was the focus of your graduate education?

- Higher Education/Student Affairs Administration
 - Counseling/Student Affairs and College Counseling
 - Other _____
-

Q25 Are you Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino or none of these?

- Yes
 - None of these
-

Q26 Choose one or more races that you consider yourself to be:

- American Indian or Alaska Native
 - Asian
 - Black or African American
 - Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
 - White
 - Other _____
-

Q27 What is your gender identity?

End of Block: Demographics

MANUSCRIPT II

A STUDY OF THE PERCEPTIONS OF ROLE CONFLICT AND AMBIGUITY AMONG
FRATERNITY & SORORITY ADVISING PROFESSIONALS

Introduction

The field of student affairs is a highly-specialized and complex profession with various branches focused on the diverse needs of college students (Astin, 1993). One such area that has proven to be especially complicated is fraternity and sorority advising programs (FSAP). The professionals who oversee this functional area are referred to in this context as the fraternity and sorority advising professional or fraternity and sorority advisor (FSA). These individuals maintain staff oversight and support for fraternity and sorority communities and members at the institutional level.

FSAs are often tasked with providing holistic support for individual affiliated students, the groups represented on campus, and their respective governing councils. The FSA is also often tasked with communicating with alumni volunteers and coordinating with various structures of governance that varied by group. FSAP generally covers topics such as personal and professional development, career readiness, academic success, accountability, and areas of organizational management. FSAs are also often tasked with disciplinary functions, interventions, and recommendations as to what chapters should remain on campus after an adverse incident occurs. (CAS, 2009, p. 229 – 236).

Numerous studies, including those from the Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors by Koepsell & Stillman (2016) indicate that many FSAs leave the field after a short tenure. This high rate of attrition has unintended consequences for college campuses, students, and fraternal organizations. There are many tangible and intangible costs that are realized as a result of this high rate of departure. Marshall, Moore Gardner, Hughes, and Lowery (2016) and Rosser and

Javinar (2003) provided insight into these costs. They described these costs in terms of losses of financial capital, productivity, efficiency, consistency, relationships, knowledge, the delivery of services, and much more. These injuries represent just a few of the reasons why it is necessary to understand the experiences and perceptions of the FSA to better appreciate the myriad reasons for departure and to proactively address them.

Two recognized role stressors that are associated with high rates of turnover are role conflict and role ambiguity. Studies by Gold & Roth, 2013; Khan, Yusoff, Khan, Yasir, & Khan, 2014; Rizzo, House & Lirtzman, 1970; and Wolverson, Wolverson & Gmelch, 1999 have demonstrated that role conflict and role ambiguity are contributing factors in employee attrition across an array of industries and position types, including nurses, teachers, academic deans, and others in the United States and internationally. When considering FSAP, it is reasonable to conclude that the professionals in this arena, due to the nature of the position, may experience role conflict and ambiguity. These stressors may present themselves as navigating competing interests of students and campus administrators, reconciling direction from multiple constituents or supervisors, and managing unrealistic expectations from multiple parties. Additionally, they may result from too few resources, too many restrictions, or even a lack of understanding and direction from senior level staff. Bender (2002) and Jones-Hall (2002) identified that FSAs have more constituents than most any other area in student affairs. They include students, parents, community members, faculty, volunteers, governing bodies, etc. These examples are indicative of role conflict and role ambiguity.

As described by (Chen, Rasdi, Ismail, & Asmuni, 2017; Guimaraes, 1997; Wolverson, Wolverson, & Gmelch, 1999) role conflict and role ambiguity have a relationship to one's intention to leave an organization. As such, it is important to understand to what extent FSAs

perceive and experience these types of role stressors so that recommendations may be made that might positively impact the rate of professional retention.

Theory

Social scientists George Herbert Mead, Jacob L. Moreno, and Ralph Linton (1930) theorized that behavior and social structures were connected by the *role* or *roles* a person fulfills (Biddle & Thomas, 1966). Role theory is often used to explore different areas of academic study to better evaluate inter/intrapersonal interactions, expectations, and norms (Biddle, 1979).

Utilizing role theory to frame the concept, the researcher sought to measure the extent to which current and former FSAs perceive instances of role conflict and role ambiguity within their FSAP work environment. Role theory provides the foundations for critical understanding of effective management practices. Additionally, research on role stressors and their negative impact on satisfaction and role fulfillment underscore the need to design positions with intentionality and role theory considerations. Fellows and Kahn (2103) explained that theories of job design emphasize the need to clearly define tasks and responsibilities associated with work roles, in addition to specifying performance expectations. They underscored the need to craft positions that are absent substantial role conflict and/or ambiguity.

Methodology

Guided by the question, “Does role conflict and role ambiguity exist among fraternity/sorority advising professionals?” A quantitative study with one qualitative question was conducted by the researcher to better understand and interpret the perceptions held among FSAs with respect to role conflict and role ambiguity. For the purposes of this study, an alpha level of .05 was used for all statistical tests. The study was primarily conducted utilizing the Role Conflict and Ambiguity Questionnaire (RCAQ) first developed by Rizzo, House, and Lirtzman

(1970). Answers to supplemental questions regarding levels of satisfaction, and organizational commitment were also collected (see Appendix B). The RCAQ is widely adopted and accepted by social science researchers as a reliable measure of the perceptions of role conflict and ambiguity. The RCAQ has been demonstrated reliable and valid by many researchers who studied a wide selection of professions and job functions in the United States, Europe, China, and Pakistan (Conley & Woosley, 2000; Khan, Yusoff, Khan, Yasir & Khan, 2014; Lawrence & Kacmar, 2012; Wolverson, Wolverson, Gmelch, 1999; Wu & Norman, 2006).

The RCAQ has been psychometrically verified across a multitude of studies over a number of years. The reliability and stability of the constructs have been deemed valid time and again (Schuler, Aldag, & Brief, 1977; Tracy & Johnson, 1981; Kelloway & Barling, 1990; King & King, 1990; Netermeyer, Johnson, & Burton, 1990; Smith, Tisak, & Schmieder, 1993). The RCAQ has not been used previously in the context of measuring the perceptions of role conflict and ambiguity among FSAs.

Overview of Research

A quantitative study, with the exception of one qualitative question, of the perceptions of role conflict and role ambiguity among current and former FSAs was conducted in spring 2020. Role conflict and role ambiguity are known role stressors, and are associated with reduced job satisfaction, intention to leave a position, and burnout (Chen, Rasdi, Ismail, & Asmuni, 2017; Guimaraes, 1997; Wolverson, Wolverson, & Gmelch, 1999). The RCAQ was adopted and replicated with the permission of Sage Publications. Additionally, the researcher included a number of demographic and informational questions to better understand any mitigating factors and to better analyze results that may be attributed to various subgroups within the profession.

The 14 item RCAQ is measured on a seven-point Likert scale with items grouped into two categories corresponding to the constructs of role conflict or role ambiguity. The six items associated with role ambiguity have been reverse scored during comparisons due to positive phrasing, as notated by the authors (Rizzo, House, Lirtzman, 1970). The 8 items associated with role conflict are scored in the standard fashion. Table 1 below provides the questions asked in the RCAQ portion of the study.

Table 1
Role Conflict and Ambiguity Questionnaire

<i>Role Conflict</i>
I work with two or more groups who operate quite differently
I do things that are apt to be accepted by one person and not accepted by others
I receive an assignment without the proper resources and materials to execute it
I receive an assignment without the proper staffing to complete it
I have to do things that should be done differently
I have to work on unnecessary things
I receive incompatible requests from two or more people
I have to buck a rule or policy in order to carry out an assignment
<i>Role Ambiguity*</i>
I know what my responsibilities are
I feel certain about how much authority I have
I know exactly what is expected of me
Explanation is clear regarding what has to be done
Clear planned goals exist for my job
I know that I have divided my time properly

**items are reverse scored during comparison due to their positive wording*

Participant Recruitment and Processes

In order to gather participants who would share their perceptions of role conflict and role ambiguity, it was determined that the researcher would utilize an electronic recruitment approach to gain a national audience. The outreach plan included emails, social media and message board posts utilized by members of the Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors, the NASPA

Fraternity and Sorority Knowledge Community, and the North-American Interfraternity Conference to reach prospective participants. The NASPA Fraternity & Sorority Knowledge Community Facebook group has nearly 4,600 members. This however, comprises campus-based professionals, volunteers, headquarters-based professionals, graduate students, etc. Additionally, 1,311 emails were sent promoting the study. Both the emails and recruitment posts intentionally outlined the requirements to participate to prevent responses from ineligible parties. Responses were collected for approximately one month beginning April 16, 2020 and concluding May 12, 2020.

Prospective participants were provided a standard recruitment message in electronic format (Appendix A) along with a hyperlink to learn more about, and complete the study. Participants were informed of the nature of the study and reemphasized the requirements to participate. Participants were informed of their rights as volunteers for this study. No incentives were provided for participation. Informed consent notification was delivered prior to beginning the instrument – continuing with the survey constituted an agreement to participate. Additionally, the first question within the instrument required the participant to acknowledge informed consent in order to advance to additional questions. All research was conducted with the approval of the University of Mississippi Institutional Research Board (IRB) and under the supervision of Dr. Amy Wells Dolan.

The study (Appendix B) prompted 258 unique survey initiations of which, 211 were satisfactorily completed. Substantially incomplete responses were filtered out. Incomplete responses were defined as those who did not continue to the end of the survey. Additionally, two responses from individuals deemed to be ineligible to participate, by way of a review of their responses, were removed leaving a sample of 209 participants. It is worthy to note that

participants were not required to answer every question and some responses were left blank, as highlighted in the results section

Protecting Participants

The researcher took steps to protect the identity and confidentiality of all participants. Individual responses were anonymous and no personally identifiable data was intentionally collected. All responses were collected through the Qualtrics platform and stored in a password protected account on a password protected computer. Where individual level responses have been utilized for contextualization purposes, such as direct quotes, demographic information has been generalized and identifiable characteristics such as school or office names have been anonymized to further protect the respondent. No names, email addresses, institution names, or contact information was requested of participants, though some participants may have included identifiable information in textbox responses.

Data Review and Analysis Plan

The study from which this manuscript is derived, endeavored to analyze the perception and experiences of role conflict and ambiguity among FSAs. The overarching goal is to answer the question “*Does role conflict and ambiguity exist among fraternity and sorority advising professionals?*” By answering this question, the researcher will establish whether these role stressors exist among the sample, a population with documented high rates of attrition. Role conflict and ambiguity are stressors that are considered to have a negative relationship on longevity and satisfaction within a role.

The survey responses were analyzed using a combination of descriptive analysis, simple correlations, and bivariate analysis. Cronbach’s alpha was analyzed to verify the reliability of the

three scales. Pearson's correlations were performed to determine the relationship between scales. T-tests were conducted to determine if there were any differences in responses between groupings such as institution type. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to measure the differences between the means of groupings of more than two.

To provide context to the quantitative portion of the study, a qualitative analysis was performed on answers to the singular open-ended question within the study to identify themes and experiences connected to role conflict, ambiguity, and satisfaction.

It is important to note, the researcher originally sought to establish two groups from which to compare responses; current and former FSAs. The number of responses from former FSAs was too small ($n = 8$) to perform a comparison that resulted in any meaningful outcome. For the purposes of analyses, current and former FSAs were combined into one group. Additionally, it is important to remember that later in this study, role ambiguity and satisfaction items were reverse scored when making comparisons due to their positively worded format as indicated in the Rizzo et al. (1970) study. The researcher noted the scales whenever possible to prevent confusion.

Results

The response rate of 209 survey completions was approximately 26% of the estimated population of campus-based FSAs in the United States. This percentage was determined based on data from the Association of Fraternity and Sorority Advisors (AFA). In 2016, AFA reported membership of 626 campus-based professionals out of approximately 800 nationwide (Koepsell & Stillman, p. 4).

Profile of Participants

In this study of perceptions of role conflict and ambiguity, roughly 61% of the respondents identified as female, 35% identified as male, 2% preferred to not respond, and less than 1% reported as non-binary or other gender identity respectively. The average age of participants at the time of the study was 33 years old. The median age was 31 and the most common age was 28 years of age. Ages reported ranged from 23 to 58 years of old. In comparison, Koepsell & Stillman (2016) reported campus-based membership in AFA as 59% female and 41% male. AFA did not provide a breakdown for non-binary identities or other gender identities. Koepsell & Stillman (2016) also reported an average age of 33, a median age of 30, and the most common age as 27.

Roughly 82% of respondents in this study reported being white, 12% reported being black or African American, 2% reported being Asian, less than 1% reported American Indian or Native Alaskan, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, or other. 5% of participants reported being multi-racial. Additionally, 4% reported also being of Spanish, Hispanic, or Latina/o origin. Two individuals did not respond to the question.

Koepsell & Stillman's (2016) report indicated that AFA campus-based membership is 73% white. This is 9% less than reported in this study. Further, 14% reported as black or African American, 8% Hispanic or Latina/o, 1% Asian, 2% multi-racial, and less than 1% identified as another race. These numbers are largely consistent with the numbers reported in this study. One possible explanation for the differences is that the AFA and this study used different racial reporting methods. This researcher utilized the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) standard reporting categories as defined by the National Center for Education Statistics (2021).

In this study, a vast majority, 89% of respondents, reported an earned master’s degree, with just 2% reporting a bachelor’s degree was their highest degree earned. Roughly 8% of participants reported an earned doctorate. Additionally, less than 1% reported a degree of other. In comparison, the study by Koepsell & Stillman (2016) reported 87% of AFA’s campus-based membership having earned a master’s degree, while 7% hold a doctorate, 5% hold a bachelor’s degree and less than 1% report a degree of other.

Remaining consistent with the 2015 AFA membership data reported by Koepsell & Stillman (2016), roughly 51% of participants in this study reported having a tenure of less than 5 years. This data point seems to be consistent with the findings by Renn and Hodges (2007) that estimated between fifty and sixty percent of higher education professionals, including FSAs, would leave the field within the first five years of employment. 70% of study participants reported working for a public institution while 30% reported working for a private institution. Table 2 below provides an overview of the geographic location of the study participant’s institution.

Table 2
Geographic Location of Study Participant’s Institution

Geographic Region	Number	Percent
Northeast	47	22.49%
Southeast	64	30.62%
Midwest	53	25.36%
Southwest	18	8.61%
Western	27	12.92%
	209	100%

It is important to note, the similarities between the demographic data collected in this study and the membership data reported by the AFA in the 2016 study by Koepsell & Stillman as

demonstrated in Table 3. The two datasets bear a striking resemblance to one another suggesting consistency among the population of FSAs over time.

Table 3
Descriptive Statistic Comparison

Variable	2020 Responses	2015 AFA Responses
<i>Gender Identity</i>		
Male	35%	41%
Female	61%	59%
*Non-binary	<1%	-
*Other	<1%	-
*No Response	2%	-
<i>Age</i>		
Mean	33	33
Median	31	30
Mode	28	27
<i>Racial & Ethnic Identity</i>		
American Indian or Alaska Native	<1%	-
Asian	2%	1%
Black or African American	12%	14%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	<1%	-
White	82%	73%
*Other	<1%	-
Spanish, Hispanic, Latina/o Origin	4%	8%
**Middle Eastern	-	<1%
Multi-Racial	5%	2%

**identity categories not reported by AFA*

***identity categories not collected in this study*

Review of Informational Responses

In addition to responses to the RCAQ and basic demographic questions, the researcher collected data related to the participants' satisfaction, consideration of leaving their role, intention to leave their role, and the responses to an open ended narrative question about the participants' work environments. Participants were asked to rank their level of satisfaction for six

items on a 7-point scale. The items included clarity of role, work load, level of compensation, support from supervisor, opportunities for growth, and overall satisfaction.

All inclusive, 41% of study participants report being moderately to extremely satisfied with their role. Thirteen percent report being moderately to extremely dissatisfied with their role, leaving 46% of respondents somewhere in the middle. When broken down into specific role characteristics additional insight is gained.

Of the study participants, 36% report being moderately to extremely satisfied with the clarity of their role, which is connected to the stressor role ambiguity. This leaves 64% of participants who are only slightly satisfied, indifferent, or dissatisfied on some level with the clarity of their role.

Next, participants were asked to rank their satisfaction with the work load they encounter. Of those responding only 21% reported being moderately to extremely satisfied leaving 79% of respondents only slightly satisfied, indifferent, or dissatisfied on some level with the work load they are expected to complete.

Study participants were also asked to rank their level of satisfaction on a scale of 1 to 7 regarding their compensation. Notably, less than 19% of responses indicated they were moderately to extremely satisfied with their compensation leaving roughly 81% only slightly satisfied, indifferent, or dissatisfied on some level with their compensation. Additionally, when extrapolated out, 21% reported being extremely dissatisfied with their level of compensation.

Overall, participants reported feeling supported by their supervisor. 49% indicated they were moderately to extremely satisfied with the support they receive. Only 20% reported being moderately to extremely dissatisfied with the level of support they receive, leaving roughly 30% somewhere in the middle.

Finally, participants were asked to rate their satisfaction of opportunities for growth. Only 24% indicated they were moderately to extremely satisfied with the opportunities available to them. Conversely, 45% of respondents were slightly to extremely dissatisfied with the opportunities for growth.

Study participants were asked to disclose whether they had considered leaving or plan to leave their role due to work related role stressors. Of the 201 responses, 73% or 146 participants reported having considered leaving their role due to work related stressors. Additionally, of the 193 individuals responding to the question “*Do you plan to leave your position as a fraternity/sorority advisor in the next 6 months due to work-related stressors?*” 17% or 32 individuals answered in the affirmative. Further, an additional 8 participants had already left their role as an FSA.

The open-ended question “*Please briefly describe your working environment as a fraternity/sorority advisor.*” was included in the informational and demographic portion of the survey. Three topics emerged consistent with study concepts: role conflict, role ambiguity, and meaningful work.

Comments that indicated one or more elements defined as indicative of role conflict, role ambiguity, or satisfaction were identified as such. For example, one participant reported, “The value or productivity of the office culture at its worst is measured in meetings and events, rather than addressing more community-wide initiatives and systemic issues related to power and privilege and the health and safety of our members.” This is an example of role ambiguity. This comment indicated a disconnect between what the participant perceives as an essential function of the role and how success or productivity is being defined and measured by their formal or informal supervisor(s). An example of the theme satisfaction was demonstrated by another

participant, “The students are awesome, and I love working with them” This response was categorized as such.

Of the 209 participants in the study, 180 answered the open-ended question. Of these participants, 72% of responses mentioned or demonstrated themes consistent with one or more elements of role conflict. Forty-eight percent of responses mentioned or demonstrated themes consistent with one or more elements of role ambiguity. Additionally, 25% identified themes related to satisfaction. Table 4 below demonstrates a sampling of responses.

Table 4
Quotes Demonstrating Work Environment

-
1. “I often feel that I have to explain things [to my supervisors] over and over again to no avail or understanding. I feel exhausted at work often and do not often feel that progress is made. I do not feel that I have autonomy to make decisions and often, when decisions are made, I do not feel that they are made in the best interest of students.”
 2. “Our institution is one that is quite supportive of [FSAP] and trusts us and our opinions to successfully lead this group of students. We feel supported, even during high-risk investigations such as hazing. We are a close-knit team who all work together to support each other's areas”
 3. “I work with 11 chapters across 3 councils. I monitor events and make sure they are acceptable with university guidelines. I act as liaison between national offices and the university. I coordinate events sponsored by the Greek Life Office for chapters. I am the only person in my office.”
 4. “Our work is so interpersonally complex. No one on campus, or even nationally, gives you any grace to navigate those relationships. I love my students and they are why I keep doing this but the adults in the room make you just want to quit sometimes... Sometimes it doesn't seem worth it.”
 5. “I am on my own. My institution doesn't care about Greek Life (as long as they are behaved). Nobody at my institution knows anything about advising fraternity and sororities and cannot offer any assistance. I have a lot of autonomy, but never know if I am working on things that my institution approves of...”

6. “I have a supervisor on record (director level), but am expected to report to a different director in our office for something that takes up 30-40% of my job and time. We recently hired two staff members to work with students who have no Greek Life experience, so I feel that I spend a good amount of time catching them up to speed and coaching them through situations. Staff morale is extremely low (even before COVID-19) and as much as we tried to hide it, students were beginning to pick up on it.”
 7. “My role is one that often times no one is happy with the role or decisions that I have to enact. I am often times overruled or decisions are changed if issues are escalated. I am asked to carry out ambiguous policy decisions and then decisions/directions often change which results in damaging the department, staff, and my credibility with students, headquarters, and volunteers.”
 8. “I spend a great deal of my time in meetings (days, nights, weekends), trainings and programs. You have to have proficiency in many areas - advising, supervising, event planning, academic support, risk management, crisis management, conduct, leadership development, member development, organizational development. As an FSL professional, you are essentially expected to work with students in every aspect of their lives.”
-

Data Analysis

Of the 258 who started the survey, 209 were considered substantially complete. According to the data collected on role ambiguity items, FSAs are certain of their responsibilities ($\bar{x} = 6.06$ on a 7-point scale where 1 = very false and 7 = very true) indicating less ambiguity about their role. A mean of 6.06 would represent an answer to the question “I know what my responsibilities are,” slightly above true. They also feel somewhat certain of what is expected of them ($\bar{x} = 4.92$), followed by a moderate understanding of how much authority they have ($\bar{x} = 4.79$). Both answers leaning towards the “somewhat true” response. It is important to note, the role ambiguity scale is the perception on two items “Clear planned goals exist for my job” and “I know that I have divided my time properly” where the means equaled to 4.31 and 4.21 respectively, indicating a more neutral position.

Conversely, on the role conflict portion participants indicated they perceive a high level of conflict when indicating they work with two or more groups who operate quite differently (\bar{x} = 6.44 on a 7-point scale where 1 = very false and 7 = very true). Additionally, FSA experience having to do things that should be done differently (\bar{x} = 5.02) indicating an average answer of somewhat true. Less problematic seems to be the perception that “I have to work on unnecessary things” (\bar{x} = 4.42) and “I receive incompatible requests from two or more people” (\bar{x} = 4.42) both ranging towards the neutral part of the scale. Curiously, the item “I have to buck a rule or policy in order to carry out an assignment” came in at the lowest level (\bar{x} = 3.60) indicating this is a perception that is somewhat false. Table 5 below displays the means and standard deviation for each item within the RCAQ instrument.

Table 5
Role Conflict and Ambiguity Responses

Variable	<i>N</i>	Means	Standard Deviation
<i>Role Conflict</i>			
I work with two or more groups who operate quite differently.	209	6.44	1.13
I do things that are apt to be accepted by one person and not accepted by others.	209	4.95	1.66
I receive an assignment without the proper resources and materials to execute it.	209	4.59	1.68
I receive an assignment without the proper staffing to complete it.	209	4.95	1.63
I have to do things that should be done differently.	209	5.02	1.59
I have to work on unnecessary things.	209	4.42	1.73
I receive incompatible requests from two or more people.	209	4.21	1.81
I have to buck a rule or policy in order to carry out an assignment.	209	3.60	1.78
<i>Role Ambiguity</i>			
I know what my responsibilities are.	209	6.06	0.94

I feel certain about how much authority I have.	209	4.79	1.53
I know exactly what is expected of me.	209	4.92	1.93
Explanation is clear regarding what has to be done.	209	4.51	1.44
Clear planned goals exist for my job.	209	4.21	1.49
I know that I have divided my time properly.	209	4.31	1.55

On the satisfaction portion of the survey, not part of the original RCAQ, participants ranked their satisfaction on 6 items on a scale from 1 to 7. The items below are reverse scored where 1 would indicate extremely satisfied and 7 would indicate extremely dissatisfied. The participants indicated they are somewhat satisfied with the clarity of their role ($\bar{x} = 3.19$), the support they receive from their supervisor ($\bar{x} = 3.21$), and their overall satisfaction ($\bar{x} = 3.25$). The reported level of satisfaction with compensation ($\bar{x} = 4.56$), workload ($\bar{x} = 4.23$), and opportunities for growth ($\bar{x} = 4.15$) all pointed toward being somewhat to moderately dissatisfied.

To check for internal consistency, Cronbach's Alpha was performed on the three scales within the study. The role conflict scale consisted of 8 items for which the Cronbach's Alpha was .82. The role ambiguity scale consisted of 6 items for which the Cronbach's Alpha was .81. Finally, the satisfaction scale consisted of 6 items for which the Cronbach's Alpha was .83. All three scales are considered to be highly reliable.

To analyze the relationship between the role conflict, role ambiguity, and satisfaction composite scores Pearson's correlations were performed. The mean composite score and standard deviation for role conflict, role ambiguity, and satisfaction are detailed in Table 6 below.

Table 6
Role Conflict, Ambiguity, and Satisfaction Composite Scores

Composite	<i>N</i>	Means	Standard Deviation
Role Conflict	209	4.77	1.09
Role Ambiguity*	209	3.20	1.32
Satisfaction*	208	3.77	1.01

**Items were reverse scored due to the wording of the questions.*

In this study, role conflict, role ambiguity, and satisfaction were all significantly correlated. As role conflict and role ambiguity increase, satisfaction decreases as demonstrated in Table 7 below. Role conflict and role ambiguity were significant in explaining 38% of the variance in overall satisfaction ($R^2 = .38$).

Table 7
Role Conflict, Ambiguity, and Satisfaction Correlation

Composite	<i>N</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
Role Conflict	209	.48	< .001
Role Ambiguity*	209	-.45	< .001
Satisfaction*	208	-.55	<.001

**Items were reverse scored due to the wording of the questions.*

T-tests were used to determine if there was a significant difference of the means between various groups within the study. For example, institution type, or if they had considered leaving their position due to stress related factors, or if they planned to leave their position within the next 6 months.

As demonstrated in Table 8 below, the results indicate that there is not a significant difference between the responses by institution type. For public institutions, the mean role conflict score was 4.80 with a standard deviation of 1.08, For private institutions, the mean role

conflict score was 4.70 with a standard deviation of 1.14, $t(1) = .61, p = .54$. For public institutions, the mean role ambiguity score was 3.24 with a standard deviation of .98. For private institutions, mean role ambiguity score was 3.10 with a standard deviation of 1.08, $t(1) = .96, p = .29$. For public institutions, the mean satisfaction score was 3.74 with a standard deviation of 1.26. For private institutions, the mean satisfaction score was 3.84 with a standard deviation of 1.45, $t(1) = -.47$ and $p = .10$.

Table 8
Role Conflict, Ambiguity, & Satisfaction by Institution Type

	Public		Private		$t(1)$	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
Role Conflict	4.80	1.08	4.70	1.14	.61	.54
Role Ambiguity	3.24	.98	3.10	1.08	.96	.29
Satisfaction	3.74	1.26	3.84	1.45	-.47	.21

Intent to leave was determined by asking, “Do you intend to leave your position in the next 6 months...due to work related stressors?” This question yielded two significant differences between those who answered “yes” and those who answered “no.” The group who answered “yes” ($n = 32$) to the question had a significantly higher dissatisfaction ($M = 5.17, SD = .95$), $t(1) = 8.10, p = .04$. where 1 is extremely satisfied and 7 is extremely dissatisfied. The “yes” group also had significantly higher levels of role conflict ($M = 5.35, SD = .81$), $t(1) = 3.49, p = .01$. than those who answered no ($n = 161$). There was no significant difference between the answers regarding intent to leave and role ambiguity.

An additional question, regarding the consideration of leaving was posed, “Have you ever considered leaving your position as a fraternity/sorority advisor due to work-related stressors?” 73% of those responding answered “yes.” There was however, no significant statistical

difference in the levels of role conflict, ambiguity, and satisfaction reported by either category of respondent.

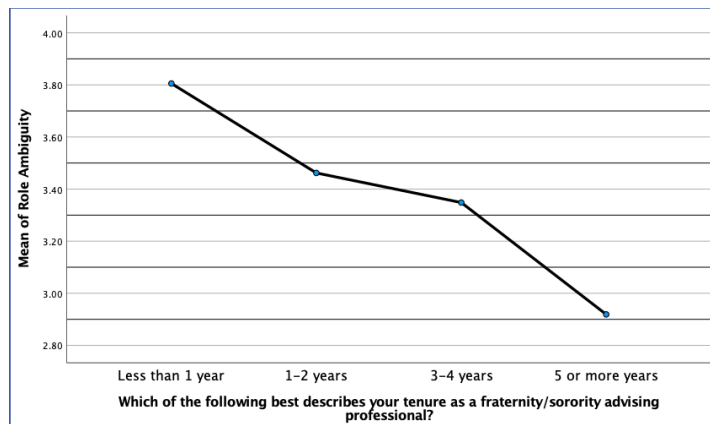
Where there were more than two groups to compare, an ANOVA test was performed to determine if the means of the groups were significantly different. For example, level of education, number of full-time equivalent students, gender identity, number of affiliated students, and time in position.

Consistent with Wolverson, Wolverson & Gmelch (1999) study of academic deans, the level of perceived role conflict, ambiguity, and satisfaction in this study were not significantly different when compared by age, race, or gender identity. Additionally, there was no statistically significant differences in perceived levels of role conflict, ambiguity, or satisfaction based on levels of education.

Tenure as an FSA was compared to the composite scores of role conflict, ambiguity, and satisfaction. Neither perceived levels of role conflict or satisfaction produced statistically significant results between the tenure categories. However, there was a statistically significant difference between the levels of perceived role ambiguity and two sets of tenure categories $F(3,205) = 6.60, p < .001$. Tukey post-hoc tests showed there was a significant level of difference reported between perceived role ambiguity for those with less than 1 year tenure and those with 5 or more ($p = .003$) Additionally, there was a statistically significant difference in the perceived level of role ambiguity between those with 1 – 2 years of tenure and those with 5 or more years ($p = .012$).

Not surprisingly, these findings indicate that as time in position increases, ambiguity about the role decreases. On this table, higher equals more ambiguity and lower equals less. Figure 2 below demonstrates the decreasing level of role ambiguity over time.

Figure 2
Perceptions of Role Ambiguity Over Time



Additionally, the differences in perceived role conflict, ambiguity, and satisfaction were compared by the number of full-time equivalent (FTE) students and the number of affiliated students. Neither group sets produced statistically significant differences.

Discussion

The descriptive statistics produced as a result of this study provide interesting insight into the FSAP functional area. Readers can note the demographic responses collected in this study in spring 2020 were largely consistent with the 2015 AFA membership data reported by Koepsell & Stillman (2016). The mirroring of these results is an interesting finding considering the nearly 5-year difference in reporting timeline. This corroboration suggests the relative age of campus-based professionals has remained consistent indicating a similar pattern of turnover and continued youthfulness of the profession as noted by Koepsell & Stillman (2016). This revelation further underscores the necessity of this research.

In comparing the descriptive data from the RCAQ portion of this study with that of the 1999 study by Wolverton, Wolverton & Gmelch there are fascinating similarities and differences in the results. The resulting data associated with role ambiguity in this study largely reflect that

of the Wolverton et al. (1999) study with one notable exception. The item “I know what my responsibilities are.” This study resulted in a mean score of 6.06 compared to that of 5.51 in the Wolverton et al. (1999) study. The other components within the role ambiguity scale demonstrated slightly lower scores than their academic dean counterparts on campus. When reviewing each of the ambiguity item scores, they indicate that FSAs are confident in their responsibilities, but some confusion exists about how much authority they have, what is expected of them, clear explanation and goals, and if they have divided their time properly. This leaves room for coping mechanisms that result in dissatisfaction and less effectiveness as outlined by Rizzo et al. (1970) “the lack of the necessary information... will result in coping behavior by the role incumbent... increase the probability that a person will be dissatisfied with [their] role, will experience anxiety, will distort reality, and will thus perform less effectively” (p. 151).

Interestingly, the results collected in the role conflict portion of this study surpassed that of the Wolverton et al. (1999) study on every item. This would seem to indicate that FSAs experience a higher level of role conflict than their academic dean counterparts on campus. Appendix C demonstrates the differences between the two datasets.

The statistically significant correlations between role ambiguity, role conflict, and satisfaction further highlight and underscore the need to mitigate the factors that lead to increased ambiguity and conflict. As indicated by this study and the overwhelming literature (Rizzo et al., 1970; Fried & Tiegs, 1995; Wolverton et al. 1999) role conflict and role ambiguity have a direct relationship to overall job satisfaction and organizational commitment.

In a group with documented retention issues such as FSAs we must consider how we develop, support, and assess these critical roles within the institution. As noted previously, the role of the FSA is inherently complex. When coupled with issues such as dual reporting,

collateral assignments, understaffing, too few resources, and more, it is no wonder there is a retention problem.

Limitations, Implications, and Strengths

It is important to note, responses were collected at the beginning of, the COVID-19 pandemic spanning April 16, 2020 to May 12, 2020. This study collected responses at a time when most FSAs would not have been significantly impacted by this health crisis and the severity and lengthiness of the pandemic were still unknown. This global emergency has changed the ways in which many around the world work and communicate. Whether these changes are permanent has yet to be seen.

While not the focus of this particular study, the COVID-19 pandemic added a new layer of role stressors to a group of professionals already plagued by high level challenges and oftentimes few resources and little support. As previously mentioned, FSAs are often entry level positions with low pay, long hours, and high-level responsibilities that are filled with conflict and ambiguity. Navigating health and safety issues, housing shortages, and policy creation and enforcement in addition to their standard high-stakes role likely increased perceptions of role stressors. Additional research that examines perceptions of role stressors during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic might reveal new insights regarding role conflict and ambiguity, coping mechanisms, and the tradeoffs and choices made by FSAs in this time period. The length and severity of the pandemic could provide implications for future research to determine the impact, if any, the pandemic had on perceptions of role conflict and role ambiguity and rates of departure among FSAs.

Further research is also needed to establish the mechanisms and supports that reduce ambiguity and conflict and increase satisfaction. Basing this approach in best practices and data

driven decisions will help establish the necessary benchmarks needed to justify change within these well-established roles on campus. The researcher will explore some of the possible conflict and ambiguity reduction mechanisms in manuscript III of this series.

As noted previously, the low level of response from former FSAs resulted in being unable to compare the responses from the two groups. A replication of this study, further targeting former FSAs, in order to perform a comparison between the groups may lead to additional insight about the levels of role conflict and role ambiguity that the FSAs experience. This information is important to further establish any patterns or correlations between perceptions and experiences that lead to their departure.

Understanding the unique nature of the FSA role, the various constituents and diverse interactions, and the levels of functional area knowledge required is necessary to address the challenges. The FSA role as a student advocate, university administrator, and community resource will likely always be a cause of role conflict. Adequate staffing, resources, and a critical understanding of role of the FSA by campus leaders, educators, and administrators could provide a respite from the conflict and ambiguity that is experienced by these campus-based professionals.

Professional Commentary

It is not uncommon, in our world today, to see fraternity and sorority chapters in the news for problematic reasons often casting a negative light on the host institution. The negative press should be the least of the worries for college and university leaders in the high-risk environment displayed on many campuses today. Universities and administrators cannot afford to ignore the stressors like role conflict and ambiguity that inevitably result in high rates of professional attrition among FSAs. The cost of discounting these role stressors and in some cases, as

demonstrated in the qualitative commentary, the role itself are far too high. The losses associated with high rates role conflict and ambiguity add up to the loss of the university employee(s) closest to one of the highest profile groups of students on the campus today.

If colleges and universities indeed want to allow students to freely associate with student groups as afforded by the freedom of association as established in *NAACP v. Alabama* (1958), and they believe the university a place for students to learn and grow with the guidance of educators and practitioners, then the leap to thinking critically about how to reset, reprioritize, and recommit to the FSA role should be a short one.

It is incumbent upon senior level administrators to review current roles and expectations, refine job descriptions to align with best practices, and develop metrics for success that are mutually agreed upon and rooted in current practice, and report upon the outcomes that are most important to the student experience. For those with little knowledge or understanding of this area of practice, the resources provided by the AFA in the *Core Competencies Manual* (2018) is a good place to start when combined with role theory and intentional role design considerations.

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LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT COPY

Appendix A
Recruitment Copy

Hello, my name is Tony Vukusich and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Mississippi. I am recruiting participants for my dissertation study. Participants will engage in a short demographic and informational questionnaire followed by a quantitative study instrument regarding personal perceptions of role conflict and role ambiguity in your fraternity/sorority advising work environment. Participants must be 18 years or older and be a current or former professional employed full-time at a college or university in a fraternity/sorority advising capacity. You can participate by clicking [HERE](#).

APPENDIX B: ROLE CONFLICT AND ROLE AMBIGUITY QUESTIONNAIRE (RCAQ)
AND DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

Appendix B

Role Conflict and Role Ambiguity Questionnaire (RCAQ) and Demographic Survey

Perceptions of Role Conflict and Role Ambiguity Among Fraternity and Sorority Advising Professionals

Start of Block: SURVEY INSTRUCTION

Q1 *By participating in this survey, I certify that I am 18 years of age or older.* **Description**

The purpose of this research project is to determine the extent to which participants experience role conflict and role ambiguity in their work. I would like to ask you a few questions utilizing the Role Conflict and Ambiguity Questionnaire (RCAQ). You will not be asked to provide any identifying information beyond basic personal contact information and demographic information. Your responses will remain confidential. **Participant and Time Expectations** You will be asked to respond to an online demographic questionnaire and a 14-question inventory, this should take an estimated 10 minutes. **Requirements** You must be 18 years of age or older and a current or former fraternity and sorority advising professional employed full-time at an institution of higher education (college/university) in a direct Fraternity/Sorority Advising position. TO READ MORE INFORMATION ON THIS STUDY CLICK [HERE](#)

End of Block: SURVEY INSTRUCTION

Start of Block: Informed Consent

Q2

Welcome to the research study!

We are interested in understanding the experiences and perceptions of role conflict and role ambiguity among fraternity and sorority advising professionals. You will be presented with information relevant to role conflict and ambiguity and asked to answer some questions about it. Please be assured that your responses will be kept confidential.

The study should take you an estimated ten minutes to complete, and you will receive no incentive for your participation. Your participation in this research is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at any point during the study, for any reason, and without any prejudice. If you would like to contact the Principal Investigator in the study to discuss this research, please email aev@go.olemiss.edu.

By clicking the button below, you acknowledge that your participation in the study is voluntary, you are 18 years of age, and that you are aware that you may choose to terminate your participation in the study at any time and for any reason.

Please note that this survey will be best displayed on a laptop or desktop computer. Some features may be less compatible for use on a mobile device.

Q3

Do you consent to participate in this study?

- I consent, begin the study
- I do not consent, I do not wish to participate

Skip To: End of Survey If Q3 = I do not consent, I do not wish to participate

Page Break

End of Block: Informed Consent

Start of Block: Professional Information

Q4 What is/was your job title as a fraternity/sorority advisor?

Q5 Which of the following best describes your tenure as a fraternity/sorority advising professional?

- Less than 1 year
 - 1-2 years
 - 3-4 years
 - 5 or more years
-

Q6 How many professional full-time equivalent staff members are/were in your functional area including yourself?

- 1
 - 2
 - 3
 - 4
 - 5
 - 6
 - 7
 - 8
 - 9+
-

Q7 Do you have other collateral assignments outside of fraternity/sorority advising?

▼ Yes ... No



Q8 On average how many hours do you work in a typical week as a fraternity/sorority advisor?

Q9 How many students are involved in your most recent Fraternity/Sorority community?



Q10 How many total fraternity/sorority chapters do you oversee?



Q11 Please indicate the number of governing councils represented on your campus.

End of Block: Professional Information

Start of Block: Institutional Information - based on Carnegie Classifications

Q12 Please indicate the number of full-time equivalent students at your institution.

- less than 1,000
- 1,000 to 2,999
- 3,000 to 9,999
- 10,000 +

Q13 Please indicate your institution's geographic location.

- Northeast
- Southeast
- Midwest
- Southwest
- Western

Q14 Please identify your institution type.

- Public
- Private

End of Block: Institutional Information - based on Carnegie Classifications

Start of Block: RCAQ

Q15 Please respond to the statements below, indicating their accuracy on a scale from 1 (very false) to 7 (very true).

I work with two or more groups who operate quite differently.	▼ 1 Very False ... 7 Very True
I do things that are apt to be accepted by one person and not accepted by others.	▼ 1 Very False ... 7 Very True
I receive an assignment without the proper resources and materials to execute it.	▼ 1 Very False ... 7 Very True
I receive an assignment without the proper staffing to complete it.	▼ 1 Very False ... 7 Very True
I have to do things that should be done differently.	▼ 1 Very False ... 7 Very True
I have to work on unnecessary things.	▼ 1 Very False ... 7 Very True
I receive incompatible requests from two or more people.	▼ 1 Very False ... 7 Very True
I have to buck a rule or policy in order to carry out an assignment.	▼ 1 Very False ... 7 Very True

Q16 Please respond to the statements below, indicating their accuracy on a scale from 1 (very false) to 7 (very true).

I know what my responsibilities are.	▼ 1 Very False ... 7 Very True
I feel certain about how much authority I have.	▼ 1 Very False ... 7 Very True
I know exactly what is expected of me.	▼ 1 Very False ... 7 Very True
Explanation is clear regarding what has to be done.	▼ 1 Very False ... 7 Very True
Clear planned goals exist for my job.	▼ 1 Very False ... 7 Very True
I know that I have divided my time properly.	▼ 1 Very False ... 7 Very True

End of Block: RCAQ

Start of Block: Personal Perceptions

Q17 Please briefly describe your working environment as a fraternity/sorority advisor.

Q18 Have you left your position as a fraternity/sorority advising professional?

- Yes, I have already left.
 - No, I am a current fraternity/sorority advising professional
-

Display This Question:

If Q18 = No, I am a current fraternity/sorority advising professional

Q19 Have you ever considered leaving your position as a fraternity/sorority advisor due to work-related stressors?

- Yes
 - No
 - Unsure
-

Display This Question:

If Q18 = No, I am a current fraternity/sorority advising professional

Q20 Do you plan to leave your position as a fraternity/sorority advisor in the next 6 months due to work-related stressors?

- Yes
 - No
 - Not Applicable
-

Q21 Considering your current or most recent fraternity/sorority advising role, please rank your level of satisfaction on a scale of 1 (low) to 7 (high) for the following statement:

Clarify of role	▼ 7 Extremely satisfied ... 1 Extremely dissatisfied
Work load	▼ 7 Extremely satisfied ... 1 Extremely dissatisfied
Level of compensation	▼ 7 Extremely satisfied ... 1 Extremely dissatisfied
Support from supervisor	▼ 7 Extremely satisfied ... 1 Extremely dissatisfied
Opportunities for growth	▼ 7 Extremely satisfied ... 1 Extremely dissatisfied
Overall satisfaction	▼ 7 Extremely satisfied ... 1 Extremely dissatisfied

End of Block: Personal Perceptions

Start of Block: Demographics



Q22 What is your current age?

Q23 What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?

- Less than high school degree
- High school graduate (high school diploma or equivalent including GED)
- Some college but no degree
- Associate degree in college (2-year)
- Bachelor's degree in college (4-year)
- Master's degree
- Doctoral degree
- Other _____

Display This Question:

If Q23 = Master's degree

Or Q23 = Doctoral degree

Q24 What was the focus of your graduate education?

- Higher Education/Student Affairs Administration
- Counseling/Student Affairs and College Counseling
- Other _____

Q25 Are you Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino or none of these?

- Yes
 - None of these
-

Q26 Choose one or more races that you consider yourself to be:

- American Indian or Alaska Native
 - Asian
 - Black or African American
 - Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
 - White
 - Other _____
-

Q27 What is your gender identity?

End of Block: Demographics

APPENDIX C: ROLE CONFLICT AND AMBIGUITY RESPONSE COMPARISON

Appendix C
Role Conflict and Ambiguity Response Comparison

Variable	FSA Means	Dean Means**
<i>Role Conflict</i>		
I work with two or more groups who operate quite differently.	6.44	4.72
I do things that are apt to be accepted by one person and not accepted by others.	4.95	4.38
I receive an assignment without the proper resources and materials to execute it.	4.59	4.15
I receive an assignment without the proper staffing to complete it.	4.95	4.14
I have to do things that should be done differently.	5.02	4.05
I have to work on unnecessary things.	4.42	3.97
I receive incompatible requests from two or more people.	4.21	3.73
I have to buck a rule or policy in order to carry out an assignment.	3.60	3.35
<i>Role Ambiguity*</i>		
I know what my responsibilities are.	6.06	5.51
I feel certain about how much authority I have.	4.79	4.99
I know exactly what is expected of me.	4.92	4.67
Explanation is clear regarding what has to be done.	4.51	4.66
Clear planned goals exist for my job.	4.21	4.38
I know that I have divided my time properly.	4.31	4.36
<i>*items are reverse scored in regression due to their positive wording</i>		
<i>**as reported by Wolverton et al., 1999</i>		

MANUSCRIPT III

RECOMMENDATIONS TO REDUCE THE PERCEPTIONS OF ROLE CONFLICT & ROLE
AMBIGUITY AMONG FRATERNITY & SORORITY ADVISING PROFESSIONALS

Introduction

It is well documented that fraternity and sorority advisors (FSAs) often depart their campus-based roles after a short period of time. According to the Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors (AFA) study by Koepsell & Stillman (2016), a majority, nearly sixty percent of FSAs, have less than five years' experience and leave the field at higher rates than their colleagues in other areas of student affairs (p. 6). The data collected in the study by this author corroborates the profession's relative youthfulness and the consistency of the age makeup indicating continued turnover. Informed by the results of that study, this manuscript makes three sets of recommendations that form a tripartite approach for enhancing self-efficacy to reduce role conflict and ambiguity (Appendix A). The three recommendations are considered with Tinto's seminal work on student retention and Rai's approach to reducing role conflict and ambiguity in mind.

The role of the FSA is complex and wrought with challenges. This functional area is layered with expectations from many constituencies, each focused on their own interests. Jones-Hall (2002) underscored the need for the FSA to be aware of both the various roles they fill and the power structures that exist formally and informally—reiterating the multifaceted nature of the role itself (p. 5). Binder (2002) noted that fraternity and sorority advising programs (FSAP) have more constituents than almost any other department in a division of student affairs. These constituents include but are not limited to students, parents, community members, faculty members, inter/national offices, volunteers, outside governance bodies, and more (p. 2-3).

The findings from the survey presented in Manuscript II of this Dissertation in Practice (DIP) suggested that role stressors such as role conflict and role ambiguity play a factor in overall satisfaction and organizational commitment. Roughly 73% ($n = 146$) of participants reported having considered leaving their role due to work-related stressors. The data further indicated that 17% ($n = 42$) of participants indicated they planned to leave their position in the next six months due to role-related stressors. These responses, coupled with a composite satisfaction score ($M = 3.77$, $SD = 1.32$) that indicated FSAs are only somewhat satisfied with their role on a scale where one = extremely satisfied. Additionally, composite role conflict scores ($M = 4.77$, $SD = 1.09$) indicated a moderate level on the scale when asked about the existence of items associated with role conflict, where seven = very true. Role ambiguity is also present ($M = 3.20$) but to a lesser degree, where the mean score indicated their role is somewhat unambiguous.

The high attrition rate of FSAs has an impact at every level of the institution. Universities and senior-level administrators cannot afford to ignore the losses resulting from stressors like role conflict and ambiguity. The losses are not simply the departure of valuable employees. It is the loss of the individual with the closest ties to one of the highest-profile groups of students on the campus today. Literature by Marshall, Moore, Gardner, Hughes, and Lowery (2016) and Rosser and Javinar (2003) explained staff departure in terms of the loss of financial capital, productivity, efficiency, consistency, relationships, knowledge, and the delivery of services. These losses are injuries to the institution, valuable and valued staff, and students who rely on FSAs for support.

The mitigation of role stressors can be broken down into two categories buffering techniques and amplifying techniques (Rai, 2016). These techniques can be implemented by senior-level student affairs administrators and/or the supervisors who assess and support the FSA

roles. FSAs can also utilize these two categories to mitigate stressors they encounter within their role. Action by both supervisors and FSAs is necessary; however, this manuscript focuses on the former. The recommendations within are rooted in industry best practices and role theory research. Fellows and Kahn (2013) elaborated on the importance of role theory, “It is essential to the persistence of organizations over time; individuals may join or depart, but roles endure and establish continuity.”

As demonstrated in the data collected by this author, there is a statistically significant correlation between role conflict, ambiguity, and satisfaction. I also found that FSAs experience role conflict and role ambiguity and that role conflict and ambiguity are connected to higher rates of attrition. According to Fellows and Kahn (2103), role conflict and role ambiguity can be mitigated in several ways—specifically focusing on structural role design, expectations, relationships, supports, and outcomes:

The insights generated by role theory demonstrate the need for managers to account for the structural design of role expectations and relationships, as well as the ongoing change and construction that help actors respond to the situational demands of role performance and craft desirable identities within roles. (p. 674)

It is with these considerations in mind that the recommendations within take shape.

By grouping action items into three distinct categories, the tripartite approach was developed (Appendix A). The first prong addresses the structure of the position itself, while the other two focus on supporting the individual(s) who fill the roles. The three prongs are:

1. Address structural role design and expectations
2. Assimilate the role incumbent
3. Empower the role incumbent

The tripartite approach provides for (1) a full examination of the role, including job descriptions, desired outcomes, and success measures. This assessment must also be contrasted to the actual assignments and tasks expected of the role incumbent by the multiple constituencies. Further, scrutiny must be paid to the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to successfully execute the role. Additionally, contextualization and comparison of the role with others that reside within the same organizational classification or unit are necessary to determine the validity of the organizational structure, placement within the hierarchy, and the level of expectations. (2) Thoughtful consideration of the processes by which the role incumbent is assimilated into the institution, department, team, and/or unit. Additionally, the opportunity to revise the way FSA role incumbents are hired, onboarded, collaborated and communicated with, and developed over time is provided for in this step. (3) Finally, a full examination of the institutional and social structures and supports that empower the role incumbent and facilitate meaningful professional identity development must be conducted.

Recommendations

Best practices and tactics that reduce role conflict and ambiguity and increase organizational commitment or buffer and amplify, as described by Rai (2016), should be implemented in each step of the tripartite approach. Suggestions that moderate or buffer role conflict and ambiguity reduce these role stressors' perceptions while amplifying steps increase the positive aspects of the role, resiliency, emotions, and self-efficacy (Rai, 2016).

Recommendation: Address structural role design and expectations

Staff positions within FSAP must be reviewed and structural role design and expectations examined for instances of role conflict and ambiguity. Effectively completing this assessment requires a full understanding of the FSAP area of practice and the functional areas in which the

department intersects. As described by the AFA (2018) in their publication *Core Competencies Manual*, "Foundational knowledge includes information, concepts, and ways of thinking that are unique to fraternity/sorority life and essential to serving as a fraternity/sorority professional" (p. 7). This includes knowledge of governance structures and fraternity/sorority systems. Examples of governance structures would include umbrella organization affiliation and oversight and the relationship between the chapter and inter/national organization. An example of a "system" would include the various processes for member affiliation and reporting. The AFA (2018) explained, "Collegiate fraternal organizations are subject to various sources of authority, each with their own expectations. Fraternity/sorority professionals must accurately identify, interpret, navigate, and support compliance with these expectations" (p. 7). This would include federal, state, and local laws, inter/national organizations; umbrella organizations; and volunteer structures.

Within Role Theory and Management Theory, individual roles are thought of in terms of connecting to their own role set and collective team roles and goals. For example, an individual's function and expectations match-up with other individuals' functions and expectations to form division and institution-wide goals and desired outcomes. Fellows and Kahn (2013) elaborated on the expectation:

Leaders are directed to ensure that team members are aware not only of their inclusion in a team but also of the roles that they have been selected to fill on the basis of their skills and knowledge. As teams undertake their performances, leaders facilitate integration with the role set, helping to both identify stakeholder expectations and communicate performance feedback to the team. (p. 673).

This mindset provides a framework for role design that accounts for clearly defined expectations, tasks, and responsibilities, while also ensuring individuals are clear about the measures of success within their role and how they connect to the team at large.

Foremost, adequate staffing is critical to addressing the problems associated with the role stressors. The appropriate number of individuals and the various levels of experience needed to sufficiently navigate the FSAP must be determined, as indicated by the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) FSAP guidelines revised in 2020.. Please note from Manuscript II, on average, FSAs are responsible for approximately 2,026 affiliated students while 30% of respondents worked in an office of one full-time equivalent (FTE) staff member. Based on the findings, the mean staffing in FSAP is 2.75 FTEs; the median is 2, with the most common being 1 FTE staff member. Considering the vast responsibilities and the high-level interactions that take place within the FSA role, consideration must be given to the human resource aspect of the role.

Considering most FSAs work on a team of one, there is significant room for improvement. Additionally, as denoted by the 2020 CAS FSAP guidelines, “FSAP must have access to technical and support personnel to accomplish its mission” (p. 21). Additional resources both in terms of human capital and infrastructure are needed to address role conflict and ambiguity. Armed with this data, we can be confident in taking the critical steps needed to reduce or eliminate role stressors such as role conflict and role ambiguity and promote both student success and professional satisfaction and commitment.

When considering the appropriate resources, job descriptions and delegations should be refined and consideration given to reasonable workloads. Preliminary research released in 2021 entitled "University Fraternity and Sorority Staffing Practices: Effect on Student Success"

conducted by the Timothy J. Piazza Center for Fraternity and Sorority Research and Reform (Piazza Center) at Pennsylvania State University in collaboration with the AFA and the University of Tennessee – Knoxville, Postsecondary Education Research Center suggested that there is a positive correlation between staffing structures within FSAP and affiliated student success. The research underscored that fraternity and sorority average chapter GPA is positively related to whether the senior staff member dedicates over 50% of their time to fraternity and sorority life. (p. 5). This research finding further highlights the importance of the review process advocated for above and directly connects it to positive student outcomes.

Essential functions and desired outcomes should be identified and separated from those inconsistent with the role, conflict with these newly defined outcomes, or lead to ambiguity of purpose within the organizational structure. Further consideration should be given to whether these expectations align with what is possible in context with the systems and structures unique to each fraternity/sorority and governance organization. It is necessary to remember that tasks, expectations, desired outcomes, and success metrics exist both formally and informally—from the role supervisor, role incumbent, and major constituent categories such as students, parents, alumni, faculty, other administrators, and governance bodies.

The University of California – Berkeley (2021) defined the equation for developing job expectations. They posited, performance expectations = results + actions and behaviors. When considering results, actions, and behaviors derived from tasks and assignments, it is critical to evaluate their validity. Research demonstrates that assignments and tasks perceived as illegitimate, unnecessary, unreasonable, or inconsistent with professional status create stressors within the role (Apostel, Syrek, & Antoni, 2017, p. 236). The data collected by this author described that 29% of participants answered true or very true to the statement “I have to work on

unnecessary things.” The reduction, delegation, or reassignment of tasks and assignments that are illegitimate, invalid, or do not contribute to the mission is an example of moderating or buffering that reduces role stressors.

Metrics for success and an array of associated guideposts should be developed. These metrics should outline desired outcomes for the role, timeframes for which they should be achieved, and prioritization measures that connect to role purpose and departmental and institutional missions. In their work with academic deans, Wolverton et al. (1999) suggested that preliminary agendas have moderating, or as Rai (2016) described them buffering, effects for new hires regarding role conflict and ambiguity. By providing a framework for what should be accomplished in the first two to three years, the role actor would be more successful earlier in their tenure. Wolverton et al. (1999) positioned, "Such an agenda would allow new deans to perform effectively much earlier in their careers and help prevent them from wasting precious time trying to figure out where to run, how fast to go, and what to expect at the end of the road when they get there" (p. 101). It is reasonable to believe this type of agenda would have similar mitigating effects on a complex role with high demands such as the FSA.

Metrics for success should be mutually agreed upon, clearly communicated in advance, and reviewed regularly. The FSA should be relied on in context with their subject matter expertise and included in agenda and goal setting while collaborating with senior administrators to ensure alignment with the institutional mission. CAS FSAP (2020) guidelines described, “Fraternity and Sorority Advising Programs (FSAP) must be guided by a set of written goals and objectives that are directly related to the stated mission” (p. 8). These goals should be communicated regularly and clearly to all constituents as another buffering technique that

reduces conflict and ambiguity about institutional commitment and incongruent expectations from external partners.

FSAAs can find meaning in the monotonous tasks through the process of meaning-making; whereby, tasks and assignments are easily connected to organizational goals and institutional mission. Rai (2016) reported, "One way people express positive emotions is by finding positive meaning in the mundane organizational environment. Finding positive meaning triggers positive emotions and positive emotion also increase the likelihood of finding positive meaning in subsequent events" (p. 516). Through the technique of coupling "meaning-making" with pre-established goals, the FSA can better cope with instances of role misalignment or conflict that naturally occurs.

Viewing the FSA role in context with others in the area of practice is critical when undertaking role conflict and ambiguity reduction. As noted previously in this document and current literature, the FSA role is complex with many constituents and power structures (Jones-Hall, 2002). One issue highlighted is the disparity between the role classification in most organizational structures and the high-level skillsets needed to perform the role. At most institutions, the role is considered entry-level. The CAS FSAP guidelines and standards revised in 2020 elaborated, "Unfortunately, on many campuses, the FSAP advising position is often an entry-level role for new professionals, who bring more limited knowledge and experience." This misalignment of classification and skillset must be reviewed and considered when reimagining the FSA role to mitigate role conflict and ambiguity and reduce rates of attrition.

Results from the survey presented in Manuscript II, suggested that role ambiguity decreased as tenure increased. This concept is mirrored in research published by the National Partnership for Teaching In At-Risk Schools (2005). The demands placed on FSAs and the high

rate of attrition mirrors that found within the teaching profession--specifically to the concept of assigning teachers with the least experience to the schools at highest risk. This practice has increasingly come under scrutiny. Published by the National Partnership for Teaching in At-Risk Schools, the article *Qualified Teachers for At-Risk Schools: A National Imperative* (2005) reiterated, "Experts from across the political spectrum increasingly have come to understand that a system in which teachers with the least experience are given the hardest teaching assignments is not serving the needs of students" (p. 3). They demonstrate that students who are assigned to effective teachers for three years in a row scored nearly 50 percentile points higher on testing than their peers with ineffective teachers. This result parallels the preliminary results found by the Piazza Center et al. (2021), indicating that when practitioners at senior levels spend 50% or more of their time on FSAP, students achieve at a higher level.

Through increased staffing, it is possible to warrant the addition of mid and senior-level staffing within FSAP. This effort serves in both buffering and amplifying capacities. As a buffering measure, the addition of higher classified positions—thus more tenured perspectives—reduces levels of ambiguity, anxiety, and uncertainty of how much authority the FSA has. Results revealed in Manuscript II suggested a statistically significant positive correlation between the number of full-time equivalent (FTE) staff members and longevity within the FSA position ($r = .16, p = .02$). Increased staffing classifications may create more opportunities to segment workloads reducing conflict between competing priorities, internal and external demands, and inadequate human resources. Further, the addition of roles at various classification levels provides added opportunities for advancement within the FSAP field, offering longevity within the institution as an option instead of departure. Overall, through the process of addressing structural role design you can reduce role conflict and ambiguity by developing

positions rooted in best practices, establishing goals that are connected to mission, and creating pathways for advancement within FSAP by creating staffing plans that increase FTE positions and/or elevate the FSA role within the organization.

Recommendation: Assimilate the Role Incumbent

The processes for assimilation into the institution, division, department, and team should be considered not only for new hires but for existing role incumbents who find themselves at a crossroads. As an intentional and thoughtful part of the organizational culture, this process should be ongoing and consistent. Role satisfaction and, in turn, organizational commitment are negatively connected to levels of role conflict and ambiguity. Rai (2016) discussed the extent to which social capital or interpersonal connections, feelings of belonging, trust, norms, and institutional knowledge are amplifying effects. Or, more plainly, social capital increases satisfaction and organizational commitment (p. 516). Rai (2016) elaborated, “Thus social capital formation through networking, closeness, and exchange minimizes role conflict and ambiguity.” As a result of this decrease, satisfaction, and organizational commitment increase.

During the study conducted by this author, participants noted feelings of being on a team of one, or that collaborations were not reciprocal, or that they were not valued staff members or appreciated as a department. For example, one participant stated, "I am on my own." another, "I am the only person in my office," and another, "Administration doesn't care about FSL.” These examples indicate feelings of isolation and being undervalued. In her 2017 study, Steiner found, "Participants noted that they felt most valued as a professional when they had an experience that confirmed that they were making an impact to the field and the fraternity/sorority student experience" (p. 102). Senior administrators and/or the individuals who supervise professionals in FSAP should consider the process by which new and current staff members are interacted and

adequately communicate how the FSA role and FSAPs connect to the larger mission and purpose—confirming the impact that is being made.

For decades, student affairs practitioners have pioneered, refined, and implemented high-impact practices that enhance students' retention. Data generated by Bryant (2006) described the impact these practices have had over time, "Campuses that systematically measure and act on measures of student satisfaction appear to enjoy the greatest levels of institutional and student success" (p. 32). It is reasonable to conclude that similar methods could produce positive results when applied to FSAs and other practitioners experiencing high turnover rates. The application and modification of student retention practices to benefit the retention of practitioners could be of significance.

Famously, Tinto (1988) utilized the theories of Van Genne and his assertions around membership in tribal societies to understand the stages of assimilation and departure of students. Tinto used three stages developed by Van Genne, separation, transition, and incorporation, to define the student experience. These stages can happen in a sequence, overlapping, or simultaneously. It is not unreasonable to suggest that these stages and the supports pioneered by Tinto could also be applied to understanding and improving the FSA experiences. Tinto himself underscored the wisdom of applying time-tested methods to other unrelated areas. He elaborated on his application of tribal assimilation to the collegiate setting, "We have, by example, sought to advance the time-tested notion that the study of any behavior, in this case, student departure, can be usefully informed by work outside our immediate field of inquiry" (Tinto, 1988, p. 453).

As noted by Tinto (1975), the first stage, known as separation, utilized the mechanisms of isolation, training, and various ordeals to facilitate the individual's transition. He suggested that this process was, in essence, a movement from membership in one group to membership in

another. (p. 440). When considering the entry-level FSA movement from the graduate school environment to a full professional role within FSAP, parallels can be made. Tinto described this state as moving from a position as a “known member to a stranger” in a new setting.

The graduate school environment, especially those focused on higher education-related fields, is notoriously nurturing, many having evolved out of counseling fields. Moving from this ecosystem to one characterized by conflict and ambiguity as a stranger is challenging at best. Graduate programs focused on training higher education administrators could play an important part in the transition process thus increasing retention. A focused effort to educate future higher education professionals on navigating role conflict and ambiguity through healthy coping mechanisms would have positive consequences. The mechanisms of buffering role stressors and amplifying commitment might connect well to the curriculum taught in conjunction with assistantships and practica found in many programs. Guiding future professionals through the transition stage, leaving a known environment for the unknown, must begin with a full understanding of what challenges lie ahead and the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to successfully navigate these challenges.

Tinto (1975) described the feelings that result from separation from known environments as a sense of weakness, isolation, and normlessness. (p. 441). These outlooks were borne out in the qualitative data collected and presented in Manuscript II. Normlessness or a lack of guiding principles and the associated belief structure result in the increased likelihood of departure as described by Tinto. The similarities between a lack of guiding principles, being a stranger, and isolation as described by Tinto (1975) and the idea of role conflict and ambiguity described by Rizzo et al. (1970) are striking.

The second state outlined by Van Gennevo and described by Tinto (1975 & 1988) as "transition" is the stage where persons come to have the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to adequately perform their role. In terms of role theory, this would be when the pervasiveness of role ambiguity and conflict is reduced, resulting in increased organizational commitment and satisfaction. The degree to which role incumbents must change or transition is largely dependent on how different the past norms and patterns are from what is now being expected of them. Tinto outlined the challenges of transitioning to an atmosphere largely different than an individual's previous environment, "Their past experiences are unlikely to have prepared them for the new life of the college..." (p. 445). This example provides additional insight into professional experiences in FSAP when viewed through the lens of an individual progressing through the stages of incorporation. Manuscript II of this DIP presented a statistically significant difference between the levels of perceived role ambiguity and two sets of tenure categories ($F(3,205) = 6.60, p < .001$). Tukey post hoc tests showed there was a significant level of difference reported between perceived role ambiguity for those with less than one year tenure ($M = 3.81, SD = 0.87$) and those with five or more ($M = 2.92, SD = 0.95$) ($p = .003$). Additionally, there was a statistically significant difference in the perceived level of role ambiguity between those with 1 – 2 years ($M = 3.46, SD = 0.93$) of tenure and those with five or more years ($p = .012$). These results indicated that the longer your tenure in the FSA role, the clearer the job becomes; however, many do not make it to year five.

The third stage, "incorporation" as described by Tinto (1988), is the process by which the individual assumes "the problem of finding and adopting norms appropriate to the new college setting and establishing competent membership in the social and intellectual communities of college life" (p. 446). He goes on to explain that individuals need to establish connections with

other members of the institution. Another parallel can be made between feelings of connectedness for an entry-level professional in the collegiate workplace and the importance of connectedness for students beginning their academic careers.

Utilizing Tinto's line of thinking, one could easily identify additional equivalents in the incorporation stage between students and FSAs. Tinto (1988) demonstrated, "In most situations, new students are left to make their own way through the maze of institutional life. They, like the many generations before them, have to learn the ropes of college life largely on their own" (p. 446). Tinto also described the impact of not having the skillsets needed to overcome certain situations and stressors. He described, "Some students are unable to cope with such situations. They have not learned how to direct their energies to solve the problems they face" (p. 444). These assertions resemble the commentary described earlier in this text that illuminated feelings of isolation, being on their own, and the challenges that come with the relative youthfulness of FSAs.

The assimilation of the FSA must be more than an orientation session; it should be an ongoing process of developing connections, meaning-making, establishing trust and buy-in, and continuous honest dialogue about goals and expectations. Effective assimilation encourages organizational commitment, as demonstrated by Tinto (1988). Further, Rai (2016) underscored why assimilation and commitment are so critical in complex organizations, "Organizational commitment results in member cooperation, participation, and consultation and affects who stays in the organization and works for organizational goal attainment" (p. 516). Overall, the three steps developed in Tinto's student retention model "separate, transition, incorporate" provides the framework necessary to assimilate FSAs into the larger university community.

Recommendation: Empower the Role Incumbent

Rai (2016) and Fellows and Kahn (2013) outlined that relationship building and identity development are essential in mitigating role stressors and amplifying positive outcomes like role satisfaction and organizational commitment. In her study, Steiner (2017) further reported the power of relationships, both positive and negative. She described, "Every participant shared an experience where a professional relationship contributed towards his/her burnout or wellness. Those relationships most often included a direct supervisor" (p. 100). She described that in some cases, these relationships added to feelings of burnout, and in other cases, they mitigated those feelings. Steiner (2017) reported, "Participants who reported the influence from positive work relationships with colleagues and students presented this as having an impact on their wellness and help to temper feelings of burnout" (p. 101). In the research presented by this author, participants indicated that they were only slightly satisfied with the support provided to them by their supervisor ($M = 3.21$, $SD = 2.04$) where 1 = extremely satisfied. One study participant elaborated on their supervisory relationship:

My supervisor has done fraternity and sorority advising, but lacks professional development and awareness in current trends and is not affiliated. My supervisor's supervisor has not done fraternity and sorority advising professionally, but is affiliated...All lack ongoing professional development and awareness of current trends.

The relationship described above, is one example of not having the adequate support necessary to feel empowered in the FSA role. The relationship described is one filled with ambiguity based on a lack of proper knowledge from senior leadership about FSAP resulting in the inability to properly guide the role incumbent.

Focused positive relationships that empower the role incumbent, both on campus and off, are critical to buffering role stressors. Rai (2016) described the positive impact of interpersonal

relationships and developing solidarity, “The nature of prosocial behavior minimizes overall role conflict and ambiguity...Building solidarity is another buffering strategy used by organizational members to deal with unproductive conditions” (p. 517). Steiner (2017) also underscored the notion that relationships can serve as buffering and amplifying techniques, “Participants reported the positive impact that supervisors and colleagues could have on their wellness at work. When discussing social relationships outside of their campus, participants also described how this reinforced the importance of setting boundaries” (p. 97).

Encouraging and facilitating mentoring relationships can serve as a technique that empowers the role incumbent and promotes retention. Mentors, those who fully understand the FSA role's demands and who are committed to helping other professionals succeed, create a space where FSAs feel understood, valued, and supported within their institution and outside it. As noted in the 1999 study by Wolverton, Wolverton & Gmelch, being on your own can make the road a long one, and a mentor can serve as a critical lifeline that reduces conflict and ambiguity. (p. 101). Wolverton et al. (1999) also underscored the positive outcomes associated with mentorship, such as defining responsibilities, levels of authority, and time allocation, thereby reducing role conflict and role ambiguity. They outlined:

Mentors seem to have a viable place in the work lives of deans. It appears that mentors can help new deans define their responsibilities, set priorities and goals, delineate how much authority they actually have, and manage time effectively, thereby reducing role ambiguity...A mentor does need to be willing to serve as a sounding board and good listener. He or she does need to understand what it means to work with and through other people toward a goal greater than any individual could accomplish. And he or she does need to recognize the dilemmas deans face when trying to set priorities.

Connectedness amongst peers, colleagues, and faculty can serve as a lifeline when role stressors like conflict and ambiguity are experienced. By encouraging and participating in these types of relationships, supervisors can empower FSAs to address role stressors and increase organizational commitment. Again, relying on Tinto's exploration into student departures as a guide, his research demonstrated that relationships across the institution empower students to overcome obstacles. Tinto (1975) elaborated:

Successful encounters in these areas result in varying degrees of social communication, friendship support, faculty support, and collective affiliation, each of which can be viewed as important social rewards that become part of the person's generalized evaluation of the costs and benefits of college attendance and that modify his educational and institutional commitments. (p 108).

Following this line of thought, increased relationships for FSAs will empower them to be more committed to the role and enable them to overcome setbacks. Rai (2016) highlighted the connection between relationships and professional retention:

Research suggests that resiliency depends on an individual's ability to connect and to interact and on the quality of interpersonal relationships, all of which allow people to bounce back from setbacks and to comprehend difficult situations, and figure out the best way to deal with them. (p. 517)

The expression of authentic and preferred professional identity in one's role is critical to facilitating engagement and organizational commitment. Fellows and Kahn (2013) discussed that role actors would only engage in their role so far as they are allowed and encouraged to demonstrate preferred identities. When preferred identities are limited, so is the incumbent's

willingness to fully engage—resulting in a performance at a perfunctory level. Fellows and Kahn (2013) explained:

In some cases, actors will not be satisfied with the expressive potential of their role as specified by the organization and will undertake job crafting to fashion positive identities, either by changing the tasks associated with the role, the manner in which they are performed, or, at the very least, reconceptualizing [sic] the meaning of those performances. (p. 674).

Allowing role actors to have input in and ownership of their role to express preferred professional identities will provide the opportunity for advanced engagement and organizational commitment.

Empowering identity development within a role is more than praise or recognition; but a way to demonstrate the impact the actor has on the institution at large. Fellows and Kahn (2013) demonstrated, “This approach goes beyond traditional concepts of recognition and prestige and can involve helping actors perceive the significance of their performance outside the immediate role set or leaving room within formal specifications for individual variation in performance” (p. 674). Again, taking this step will allow for positive professional development and encourage increased or “amplified” organizational commitment; in turn have mitigating effects on intention to leave the organization.

Conclusion

The tripartite approach to reducing role conflict and role ambiguity (Appendix A) is designed to decrease role stressors, amplify organizational commitment, and increase the self-efficacy of FSAs. Role stressors and negative outcomes like reduced organizational commitment can be mitigated by promoting and developing self-efficacy and vice versa. Rai (2016) described

self-efficacy as a key component to buffering role stressors and amplifying organizational commitment (p. 517). This buffering is produced when the role actors believe in their ability to successfully complete an assignment, job, or task.

Self-efficacy is produced as a result of having the tools necessary to complete the role. These tools include the proper organizational structure, the social capital necessary to complete the role, and the support provided through empowerment. One participant quoted in Manuscript II by this author elaborated on the outcomes of meaningful relationships, intentional work environments, and overall positive culture that added to being able to successfully fulfill the role and contribute to the overall team. The participant wrote:

My working environment is actually pretty healthy and meaningful. Being one of the new staff members on the team this academic year was anxious at first [sic]; however, the team really was able to build rapport and cohesion from the time we began. In result, I realized our working environment was pretty much cultivated through intentional and meaningful working relationships. In addition, the division of student life and the institution overall strives to cultivate positive, intentional and healthy work environments for all students & faculty/staff.

It is incumbent upon the individuals tasked with supervision of FSAs to create an environment and culture where FSAs can not only survive but thrive and serve the campus community effectively and authentically. Rai (2016), in his research on patient care, described the role of leadership in reducing role conflict and ambiguity:

Leadership should demonstrate appreciation for workers' honesty, sincerity, and integrity. They should encourage social networking, trust, quality interpersonal relationships, bonding, and prosocial activity among staff members. The administrations'

observation and assessment should be supplemented by the employees' point of view in any decision making. If these practices are followed, role conflict and role ambiguity are likely to be minimized, and consequently, both staff-client relations and the quality of care will improve. (p. 518).

When considering the tripartite approach designed by me to (1) address structural role design, (2) assimilate the role incumbent, and (3) empower the role incumbent, it is important to note that this process should be viewed as collaborative. As demonstrated in the literature, input from FSAs will also increase self-efficacy through being cultivated as a valued and trusted colleague. Future studies that explore the collaborations and supports derived from the implementation of student retention models to FSA should be undertaken. Additionally, research surrounding the addition of positions at various levels and any related outcomes within FSAP should be considered to determine the impact, if any, on longevity. Such studies could produce additional tangible steps that enhance the tripartite approach.

When considering how to increase the retention of FSAs, one must not look farther than our own backyard. Student affairs practitioners have developed retention techniques for decades. Applying seminal works from scholars such as Tinto (1975 & 1988) to reduce role conflict and role ambiguity could positively impact the persistence and retention of practitioners in the field.

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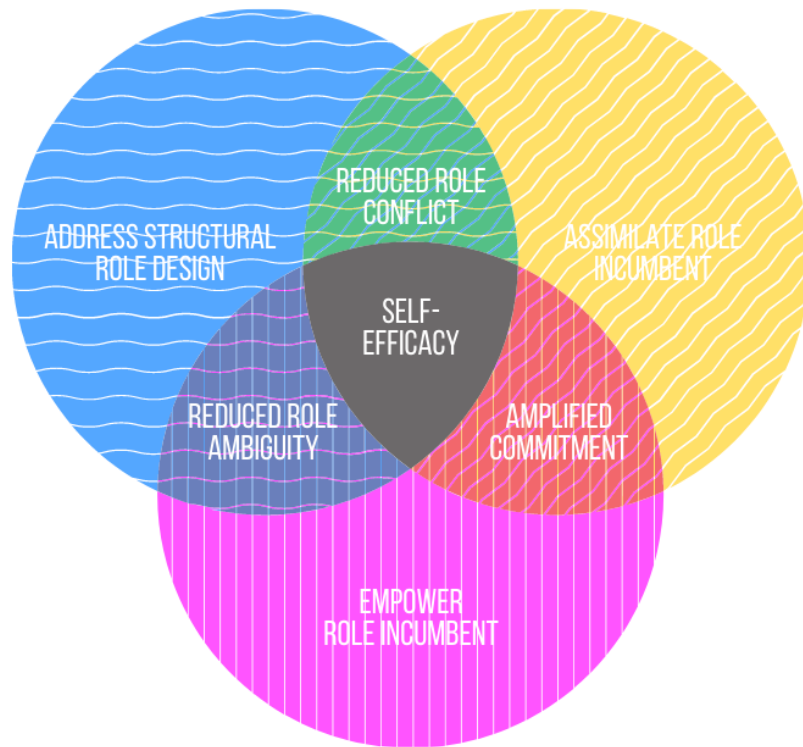
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APPENDIX: A TRIPARTITE APPROACH FOR REDUCING ROLE CONFLICT AND ROLE
AMBIGUITY AND INCREASING SELF-EFFICACY

Appendix
*A Tripartite Approach for Reducing Role Conflict and Role Ambiguity
and Increasing Self-Efficacy*



TRIPARTITE APPROACH

At the intersection of the tripartite approach is self-efficacy - resulting in reduced attrition due to role conflict and role ambiguity.

VITA

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Education

- 2015 – present Ed.D. Candidate, Higher Education, School of Education, The University of Mississippi, University, MS
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2016

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