

STAFF REACTIONS TO INTERIM LEADERSHIP
IN A STUDENT AFFAIRS
ORGANIZATION

by

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A DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Education in the
Department of Educational Leadership,
Policy, and Technology Studies
in the Graduate School of
The University of Alabama

TUSCALOOSA, ALABAMA

2011

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ABSTRACT

Interim leadership appointments in higher education are a common strategy used to fill leadership gaps in executive positions. Because student affairs executives are particularly vulnerable to high turnover rates, interim appointments are becoming more widespread. Even with the prevalence of this trend, little attention has been given to the ripple effect that the appointment has on the professional student affairs staff.

Building on Farquhar's (1991) framework of organizational dynamics during interim administrations, this single site case study explored the interim executive appointment on a student affairs division at a mid-sized, public, four-year university in the southeastern United States. Fifteen interviews were conducted during the winter of 2011 of professional staff members who were directly affected by the turnover. In addition to the interviews, the staff was observed during regularly scheduled department/division meetings. The university's web site and campus wide email communications provided supporting documents for analysis.

Many of the findings were consistent with framework used in this study. However, in addition to Farquhar's concepts, the interim's charge was found to be a significant issue for the staff in that neither the interim leader nor his staff clearly understood the goals of the interregnum. The ambiguity of the charge created circumstances within the division where expectations were mismanaged, productivity decreased, and factions arose between individuals in the division. Recommendations for practice include clarification of the interim's goals and improving communication with and among the staff.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I find it difficult to put into words how grateful I am to all those who provided love and support during this journey to complete my doctoral degree. During the last few years, I have realized that fulfillment of this dream would not have been possible without the encouragement of the faculty in the Executive Ed.D. Program, the support of my family and friends, and the love and patience of my husband and daughters.

I appreciated that all the faculty in the Executive Ed.D. Program at the University of Alabama were committed to inspiring both my academic and professional growth. Personally, I would first like to thank my dissertation chair, Dr. Margaret King. I am grateful that our student affairs connection brought us together and appreciative of the guidance and challenges you provided that made me a better writer, thinker and leader. I would like to thank Dr. Michael Harris for serving on my committee as my co-chair and for being a sounding board throughout the whole program, not just my dissertation. The other members of my committee, Dr. Karri Holley, Dr. David Jones, and Dr. Aaron Kuntz, provided a supportive environment in which I felt encouraged to learn and grow. Lastly, I would like to thank Dr. Jennifer Jones helping me manage all the “static” in my life during this journey and for encouraging my spirit just when I seemed to need it most.

Since I began the program in 2009, my family, friends, and fellow cohort colleagues have shown me the true meaning of friendship. My friends and family were my biggest cheerleaders, even when I had to miss family get togethers and occasionally forgot a birthday. My cohort

members have become more like family to me than I ever thought possible. I look forward to our future as professionals and life-long friends. To all of you, I wish success and happiness.

Without my husband, Tombo, and my girls, Caroline and Audrey Kate, none of this would have been possible. I cannot repay you for your love, patience, and sacrifice while I pursued my degree. I cannot give you the moon and stars, which you deserve, but I promise to love you and support your dreams – so dream big! My heart is full thanks to all of you.

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CHAPTER I:
INTRODUCTION

“If you want to lead people to somewhere new, you need to meet them where they are” (Bunker, 2008, p. 15).

Complexity and Change in Colleges and Universities

Colleges and universities have become increasingly complex since they have expanded their roles in modern society. These complexities derive from (1) the interactions of institutions with varying demands of their external environments; (2) the increased structural differentiation and specialization of functions of academic and nonacademic departments; (3) the variations in expectations and human needs of workers in and clients of the institution; and (4) the variations in norms and values within an institution (Bess & Dee, 2008a, p. 16).

Clement and Rickard (1992) emphasized the challenges and difficulties that higher education leaders face “leading and governing our modern universities” (p. 7). Institutional missions have expanded and stakeholder groups have multiplied. In addition, societal expectations have swelled as demands increase for faculty and administrators to provide the resources that help solve both social and financial dilemmas (Sandeen, 1991). Because the environment is ever changing, Smith and Hughey (2006) have considered higher education to be a maturing and evolving organization. Furthermore, they believe that higher education is in a constant state of development so change, turmoil, and instability may be more the norm than most college and university leaders want to admit. College and university executives need to understand the complex nature of the higher education environment in order to lead it (Bess & Dee, 2008b; Smith & Hughey, 2006).

Impact of Leader/Staff Relationship in Student Affairs

An internal administrative responsibility that impacts the success of higher education organizations, and subsequently reflects on a leader's abilities, includes the management of personnel. Specifically for student affairs divisions, Bees and Dee (2008b), Clement and Rickard (1992), and Sandeen (1991) referred to the significant impact that the relationship between chief executive and student affairs personnel has on organizational success and performance. Bess and Dee (2008b) further argued that the more frequent the contact between student affairs leader and follower, the more the leader understands the needs of the personnel and the work environment, thus informing leadership strategies. This understanding enhances both individual and organizational performance. In addition, because student affairs often uses a team approach to deliver services, the staff are usually very collaborative and cooperative; the relationships and interactions they have with each other are equally as important (Sandeen, 1991). The tone of these relationships depends on the environment created by the chief student affairs officer and the example he/she sets for others (Sandeen, 1991).

Organizational Change and Leadership Succession

Leadership change is inevitable. Gilmore (1990) stated that the rate and frequency of executive turnover in organizations has been increasing. With the rise in leadership turnover, scholars have turned their attention to the dynamics of leadership succession for both the leader and the organization. Having considered how organizations manage such changes, Bridges (1986) believes that many organizations focus more on the logistics of leadership succession and less about the impact it has to the rest of the institution. He stated, "executives have been wise about the mechanics of change and stupid about the dynamics of transitions" (p. 25).

Austin and Gilmore (1993) reiterated the importance of considering the impact of the leadership transitions. They reported that research efforts focus on the period before and after a leadership turnover, leaving the actual period of leadership transition, where there is much impact for those leaving and staying, unstudied. According to Bess and Dee (2008b), there has been value in studying this period because “the process of changing from one leader to the next may be disruptive and destabilizing, since the new leader may initiate new policies and procedures as well as shifts in organizational design and personnel” (p. 865).

Increasing Turnover Rates in Higher Education

Leadership turnover rates among senior leadership in higher education are on the rise (Chapman, Chapman, & Lostetter, 1988; Gilmore, 1990; McLaughlin & Riesman, 1990; Sandeen, 2001). Both McLaughlin and Riesman (1990) and Mooney (1993) estimated the average tenure for university presidents is about seven years. Rickard (1982) and Smith and Hughey (2006) reported that university presidents and chief student affairs officers have the highest turnover rate among executive leadership at colleges and universities. While Chapman et al. noted that the tenure of senior administrators has been decreasing, they indicated that the search process for a successor has been increasing, thus lengthening the amount of time between permanent leaders.

Trachtenberg (2008) has observed that chief executives in colleges and universities make up the smallest cohort of individuals within the organization, but are the most visible and scrutinized. He noted that much of this is due to the external role that many administrators, particularly presidents and chief student affairs officers, play on their campus. Not only does their position put them in the spotlight more than any other member of the organization, but it

also adds pressure to satisfy more stakeholders. Trachtenberg believes that turnover may be expedited due to these stressful conditions of the position.

McLaughlin and Riesman (1990) concluded that the process of leadership success in higher education is similar to both corporate and political measures. Past leadership search processes resembled a more corporate model, in which a successor was chosen from within the ranks of the organization, yielding a short and private search and transition. Today, the search for a successor is more political. As a result, search processes take longer and are more publicized. Moreover, many institutions have begun to use search firms and consultants while selecting replacements.

For both leaders and followers, leadership turnover in higher education resembles a revolving door, in which leaders are always coming and going (Basinger, 2001). The very nature of the positions, combined with the complexity of the higher education environment contributes to the increased frequency of turnover (Trachtenberg, 2008). Basinger recognizes that turnover at the executive level can have lingering effects on the organization. As a result, scholars have begun to pay closer attention to the impact that turnover, extended search process and loss of organizational momentum has on the dynamics of the organization (Basinger, 2001).

Leadership Makes a Difference

While studying the effect of CEO succession on the quality of the organizational environment as well as the impact to an individual personnel member's career, Friedman and Saul (1991) asserted that leadership does make a difference in organizational performance. Reports from the literature indicate that individuals respond and react to changes in their work environment emotionally and behaviorally (Austin & Gilmore, 1993; Ballinger & Schoorman, 2007; Basinger, 2001; Bridges, 1986; Farquhar, 1991), supporting the notion that the

effectiveness of a leader hinges on the relationship that the leader and follower share (Ballinger & Schoorman). The intensity of the reaction however, may depend on the circumstances surrounding the exit of the predecessor (Ballinger & Schoorman, 2007; Farquhar, 1991).

For Freidman and Saul (1991), gathering “information about how organization members react to successions would be useful for managers and others interested in finding ways to cope effectively with leadership changes” (p. 620). Lack of understanding can negatively affect morale, productivity, strategic planning efforts and the staff’s perception of their work life experience (Basinger, 2001). In addition “opportunities for change are diminished when upper level administrators do not respond to feedback from faculty, staff, and mid-level managers who have specific, practical knowledge that could improve organizational performance” (Bess & Dee, 2008b, p. 794). In summary, organizations are looking for ways to manage leadership transitions in a way that maintains consistency, stabilizes the environment, cares for the members and promotes productivity.

Filling the Leadership Gap with an Interim Leader

Bess and Dee (2008b) believe that “wise strategies for change may determine, to a large extent, the degree to which colleges and universities experience success in turbulent environments” (p. 795). One strategy that has become more popular among colleges and universities is the appointment of an interim leader. The interim is hired to manage the transition period by fulfilling the responsibilities of the departed leader until a successor is named (Farquhar, 1995; McLaughlin & Riesman, 1990). The interim leader temporarily assumes the appointment with all the power of the permanent leader during the time *in between* (Chapman et al., 1988; Rud, 2004). Farquhar (1991) called this interim period the *interregnum*. Often incorrectly used interchangeably with the term *acting* leader, the *interim* is not just a placeholder.

They have full authority to perform all the regular duties of the executive position during an interim period of time (Chapman et al., 1988, p. 84). Mundt (2004) stated that

Interim administrators are often invisible actors in the history of a school or department. However, they are key players in maintaining stability, facilitating change, and providing a transitional pathway for the new, permanent leader. Serious preparation for the role and smart “acting” will enhance the experience for all involved. (p. 501)

Individual Benefits of Interim Leadership

Most of what is known about interim leadership refers to the benefits and expectations of the leader. One of the primary reasons one would accept an interim appointment is to develop missing professional and interpersonal skill sets (Goler, 2003; Inkson, Heising & Rousseau, 2001; Jones, Walker-Johnson, & Ondercin, 2008; Mundt, 2004). Professionally, interim leadership appointments from within an organization provide the opportunity for upcoming leaders to improve supervisory skills, management of departmental resources, utilization of new technology, as well as practice strategic planning (Goler, 2003). In addition, the interim leader can develop interpersonal skills such as effective communication, problem solving and crisis management (Goler, 2003; Inkson et al., 2001; Jones et al., 2008; Mundt, 2004). Furthermore, an interim experience may be a way for underrepresented and inexperienced persons to gain experience in leadership for both career mobility and career progression (Grigsby, Aber, & Quillen, 2009). Still there are others who accept an interim appointment in order to learn an entirely new industry or functional area for the purposes of exploring a career change (Goler, 2003; Inkson et al., 2001; Mundt, 2004; Rud, 2004). Regardless of the reason, the interim experience provides an upcoming leader with insight into the position, thus informing future career choices and increasing the likelihood of advancement (Goler, 2003). Other benefits reported by the interim leader include salary increases, professional networking and variety in the workplace (Goler, 2003; Inkson et al., 2001). Perhaps more important than professional

growth or personal achievement, Bridges (1986) and Gilmore (1990) suggest that experience in assisting institutions or companies with organizational leadership transitions will be the most sought after executive skill by potential employers.

Organizational Benefits of Interim Leadership

The individual that serves as the interim leader is not the only beneficiary of the appointment. Effective management of change and leadership transitions advances the organization (Bridges, 1986; Gilmore, 1990). Many organizations seek particular skill sets from interim leaders in order to address specific organizational problems (Donaldson, 1993; Goss & Bridson, 1998; Inkson et al., 2001). Organizational instability and crisis among personnel is a common problem created as a result of a leadership transition and one of the most frequent reasons an interim is hired (Chapman et al., 1988; Farquhar, 1991; Farquhar, 1995; Goss & Bridson, 1998; Inkson et al., 2001; Mundt, 2004, Rud, 2004). Experienced administrators or professional interims have the ability to stabilize an environment so the impact of the crisis is minimized. According to Bridges (1986) and Mundt (2004), a poorly managed transition decreases organizational consistency and employee productivity as well as hinders strategic planning efforts.

In addition to stabilization, an interim appointment provides a strategic, low cost/low risk solution to leadership between permanent appointments. Often the interim leader does not receive all the benefits, such as health care and retirement benefits that a permanent employee enjoys, therefore saving the institution money during the search for a successor (Donaldson, 1993; Goler, 2003). The lack of long-term commitment also allows the organization to make changes in leadership more freely and quickly than if a permanent successor was hired immediately (Donaldson, 1993).

This period “in-between” also provides an opportunity to reevaluate institutional or departmental goals as well as organizational cultural values. Reflecting on the departure of the outgoing leader and anticipating future needs allows individuals time to reexamine the future of the organization. The fresh perspective that an interim leader brings may facilitate this exercise in a way that increases individual productivity and re-establishes a commitment to the organization (Inkson et al., 2001).

Interest within Higher Education and Student Affairs to Use Interims

Everley (1996) interviewed former interim presidents in order to provide advice to hiring boards and potential leaders. She indicated that several hundred colleges and universities seek to utilize interim presidents annually. Goss and Bridson (1998) and Jones et al. (2008) have provided information to inform professionals and institutions about the benefits of interim appointments and potential advantages for the organization. To inform individuals, institutions and professional organizations about interim positions and to assist with placement, two unique programs have been created in recent years. The Registry for College and University Presidents founded by Allen E. Koenig and Thomas H. Langevin in 1992 and the Interim Administrator Program founded in 2008 by Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA) both strive to assist institutions and interim leaders to fill a leadership gap. The relatively new NASPA program allows institutions to post employment opportunities on their website for director level positions and above and potential candidates to post their individual profile for consideration. A coordinator attempts to match institutional needs with candidate qualifications. In addition, the site provides recommendations for hiring considerations and advantages to using an interim (Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education, 2010). The Registry for College and University Presidents expanded the scope of their service in 2002 to include a registry for senior

administrators. The organization boasts premier service while fulfilling their mission to “provide experienced interim leadership that will maximize the opportunities and fulfill the priorities established for the period of leadership transition” (Registry for College and University Presidents, 2010). June (2002) reported that the Registry had assisted with the placement of fourteen interims across the country that year alone. The registry currently boasts over 300 contracts between current interim presidents and institutions (Registry for College and University Presidents, 2010).

How Interim Appointments Affect People

Even though staff has been mentioned as a key factor in the success of the interim leader and successor, researchers often overlook them during organizational transitions (Bridges, 1986). A few of the authors who studied interim leadership focus on the organizational dynamics and impact to staff during this transition period. Most notably, while studying internal organizational dynamics during interim administrations, Farquhar (1991) identified employee attitudes during the interim period and the lasting effects of the experience. Her findings describe the employee response to the outgoing leader, involvement in the search process for a permanent successor, quality of the interim period, and entry of the new administrator. Austin and Gilmore (1993) agreed with Farquhar (1991) that the staff responds emotionally and professionally to the interim, adding that concerns over the future of the organization, personal career progression and the balance of power within organization emerged. The impact may also extend beyond the interim period. Farquhar (1991) stated, “policymakers inattentive to the organizational dynamics of these transitions may attribute post-appointment troubles to politics hostility between careerists and appointees” (p. 202), further demonstrating a need for attention in this field.

Statement of the Problem and Research Question

In the scholarly literature in higher education, little research exists that examines interim leadership. Chapman et al. (1988), McWilliam, Bridgstock, Lawson, Evans, and Taylor (2008), Mundt (2004), and Rud (2004) have considered the challenges, opportunities, and experience of the interim academic administrator, focusing mostly on the academic dean or department chair. Among known dissertations, three (Martin, 2006; Sidoti, 1997; Zenger, 1996) have studied the experiences and behaviors of interim college or university presidents and one (Ondercin, 2009) studied the experiences of mid-level interim student affairs administrators. The existing literature in higher education and student affairs includes informed practical guidelines and advice to potential interim administrators for either career progression or managing the actual appointment to the position. Even though the turnover rates for senior level administrators in higher education have increased (Chapman et al., 1988; Gilmore, 1990; McLaughlin & Riesman, 1990; Sandeen, 2001), particularly for university presidents and chief student affairs officers (Rickard, 1982; Smith & Hughey, 2006), and the use of interim appointments are more common (Farquhar, 1995; McLaughlin & Riesman, 1990), little attention has been given to the organizational dynamics during an interim appointment. Therefore the purpose of this dissertation is to better understand the organizational dynamics in student affairs during periods of interim leadership. With the help of research previously conducted on the impact of interim leadership on organizational dynamics by Farquhar (1991), this study specifically explored, what are staff reactions to interim leadership in a student affairs organization?

Methodology

Because this study explored on individual experiences and group dynamics, qualitative research methods were used (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Yin, 2003). Studying these phenomena

were furthered by the gathering of information from multiple sources such as interviews, observations, and document analysis. In this dissertation, a single site case study provided the setting to describe and examine how a student affairs staff experiences an interim leadership period.

Significance

Because the effectiveness and functionality of student affairs depends largely on the success of the relationships between leader and follower and member-to-member, understanding organizational dynamics is key. For Friedman and Saul (1991), those who appoint interim leaders need “to take into account the implications of member reactions for both immediate and long-term post succession organizational functioning” (p. 640). Because the demands of student affairs administrators are so great (Sandeem, 1991), neither the institution nor the division can afford to have times of decreased productivity, effectiveness or staff morale (Friedman & Saul, 1991).

This dissertation added to the literature on the use and impact of interim administrators in higher education by identifying staff responses to the interim period using the model introduced by Farquhar (1991). Conclusions of this research can affect scholarship and practice by:

1. Extending the knowledge base regarding interim leadership in higher education and staff reactions during the tenure of an interim leader;
2. Informing leaders and organizations about the implications of leadership of succession management;
3. Providing the short and long-term effects of interim administrations on student affairs staff who are highly relational and who also expect autonomy in the workplace; and

4. Making recommendations for practice related to interim leadership in student affairs.

CHAPTER II:
LITERATURE REVIEW

Changing Organizations: Culture, Climate and Context

Contexts of organizations concurrently create and respond to both organizational culture and organizational climate. However, the two manifest differently in the work environment. For Morgan (1997) and Lucas and Kline (2008), culture influences group dynamics and patterns of behaviors. On the other hand, Tierney (1999) and Chen and Huang (2007) consider climate to be an individual psychological perception and reaction to the organizational environment. Both culture and climate also influence how members experience the organization and how they behave as a result. When considering change, the context of the culture and climate of an organization impacts the readiness of the group and the individual to accept a new reality.

Culture and Context

Culture, defined by Morgan (1997) as “shared values, shared beliefs, shared meaning, shared understanding, and shared sense making” (p.138) among members of an organization, helps create patterns of understanding, coping, and behaviors of individuals. These patterns and shared organizational attributes give way to cultural norms. The way that individual members perceive and understand these norms becomes the organizational context in which they work, thus influencing what is considered appropriate and acceptable actions within the organization (Morgan, 1997). To put it more simply, people enact and carry out the culture and in doing so, create an ongoing reality. For Morgan, an example of culture enactment that shapes the

contextual reality for members includes “organizational structure, rules, policies, goals, missions, job descriptions, and standardized operating procedures” (p. 144).

Successful cultures and cultures ready for change are dependent on two primary conditions: cohesion and trust (Lucas & Kline, 2008; Morgan, 1997). Cohesive cultures build “common sets of norms, values, and ideas that create an appropriate focus for doing business” (Morgan, 1997, p. 142). Cohesion in groups influences functionality and relationships among members (Morgan, 1997), as well as organizational learning and making sense of organizational change (Lucas & Kline, 2008). Without a cohesive reality, organizations are fragmented. As a result, the leader bears the burden of creating a shared reality that engenders cohesion and facilitates change (Morgan, 1997).

Lucas and Kline (2008) agreed that cohesiveness is important for organizational functionality and readiness for change, but argue that a group that is too cohesive actually negatively influences organizational learning. When a culture is neither adaptive nor participating in an “ongoing, proactive process of reality construction” (Morgan, 1997, p. 141), members prohibit new information from permeating the group, thus decreasing opportunity for change (Lucas & Kline, 2008).

Cohesive cultures also rely on trust (Lucas & Kline, 2008; Morgan, 1997). Members trust each other to act in accordance with the norms and expect the use common reference points when acting in the interest of the organization (Morgan, 1997). However, when members take advantage of power or status, trust diminishes. Lucas and Kline (2008) recommended that those with higher status in the organization be aware of how their power and influence filters information for those at lower levels in the organization. Successful intergroup dynamics occur when those with less status trust the accuracy of the information received from the top.

Furthermore, Lucas and Kline (2008) suggest that when studying any type of organizational change, the researcher must understand what facilitates and prohibits change in that context, as well as what aspects of groups dynamics are involved.

Climate and Context

Organizational climate is also important to consider when determining readiness for change (Chen & Huang, 2007; Tierney, 1999). Like culture, climate also shapes individual behavior (Chen & Huang, 2007), but the experience is more about individual perceptions than shared realities (Chen & Huang, 2007; Tierney, 1999). The ways in which organizations perceive work relationships and psychologically rate the quality of the interactions and exchanges between both peers and supervisors at work create climate. Therefore, climate, much like culture, also contributes to organizational context (Tierney, 1999).

A climate that is conducive to change hinges on the quality of the relationships between members in the organization (Chen & Huang, 2007; Tierney, 1999). As with culture, trust remains a key factor in a successful climate. However, enacted or perceived cooperation is another necessary element for change. Cooperation encourages employee interaction and develops relationships (Chen & Huang, 2007). Therefore, organizational leadership plays a critical role in creating conditions that build a cooperative environment (Chen & Huang, 2007) and developing opportunities for positive interactions between employees that result in a positive perception of the work environment (Tierney, 1999). For Chen and Huang, a cooperative environment manifests itself in organizational structure. The less formal and more decentralized the structure, the more likely members are to interact with each other, resulting in higher levels of trust, cooperation and coordination. For Tierney (1999), a positive perception of climate is derived from trust but also emerges out of work autonomy, open communication, and

commitment to employee development. Under these conditions, the climate makes change more possible.

Factors to Consider During Organizational Change

Armenakis and Bedeian (1999) reviewed organizational change theory and research of the 1990's. Their findings yield four common themes associated with all change efforts in organizations. The authors state that issues related to *content*, *context*, *process*, and *criterion* are the most widely considered factors for organizations during change. Those who study *content* focus on what is being changed in the organization. Generally, this includes “strategic orientations, organizational structures, and performance-incentive programs” (Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999, p. 295). Examining *context* includes the environmental conditions of the organization, both internal (experiences during the change, job specifics, change history), and external (governing agencies, technology, market influences). *Process* issues in organizational change include actions taken during the change at both the micro and macro level. For example, a process action that influences change includes communication about the change. Organizational members are affected by who communicates, how the change is communicated, and the timing of the message. Lastly, *criterion* issues are associated with change outcomes. Success is often measured through the affective and behavioral reactions of those affected by the change (Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999).

Others who study organizational change continue to use these four themes as a framework for studying specific changes in work environments. While studying reactions to turnover and mergers, a *content* issue, Rafferty and Restubog (2010) learned that job satisfaction and levels of anxiety are indicators of how employees are adjusting to change. Examining issues of *context* revealed that the success of past organizational change impacted how well change was

implemented (Devos, Buelens, & Bouckennooghe, 2007; Rafferty & Restubog, 2010). In addition to positive change history, Devos et al. found that trust in executive management and trust in immediate supervisor increases the likelihood of organizational openness to change.

Furthermore, Rafferty and Restubog (2010) believe that employees will be more committed and have less negative preconceived notions about the impending change, if the history of change is positive.

How change is communicated and level of participation in the change effort are both *process* issues related to organizational change. Rafferty and Restubog (2010) found that the process of communication and flow of information affected levels of anxiety for organizational members. Formal communication that is timely, accurate, and sufficient decreases levels of anxiety. In addition, informal communication at the micro level that is sustained and accurate also contributed to lower levels of stress. Furthermore, Devos et al. (2007) found that employee participation in the change effort decreases the threat associated with organizational change. However, regardless of what type of issue employees were encountering, more educated individuals within organizations were more open to change (Devos et al., 2007).

Facilitating Change in Higher Education

Kezar (2001) believes that higher education as an organization has a unique value system and culture. Because the industry has distinctive features that differentiate it from other types of organizations, a customized approach to analyzing change is required. Studying change in higher education requires knowledge and awareness of organization and governance structure, professional and administrative value systems, relationships with internal and external entities, mission and goals, and an understanding of the complex culture, climate and context of the academy (Kezar, 2001).

Higher Education Administration

Context of Change

In order to study how colleges and universities work, Birnbaum (1988) asserted that we must view them as organizations with systems of individuals and groups working together for a common purpose. However, due to the complex nature of higher education organization, studying and understanding these organizations are two different matters. Bess and Dee (2008a) stated “colleges and universities are complex organizations operating in a diverse and ever-changing environment with shifting values, varying states of economic prosperity, and obscure permutations of political states of political power” (p. 2). For Woodward, Love, and Komives (2000c), the complex nature of colleges and universities is because “most higher education institutions have to deal with the paradox of being deep, enduring cultures while concurrently being contemporary, forward thinking organizations capable of leading in times of change” (p. 81).

“The ongoing state of many contemporary organizations is one of change” (Bunker, 2008, p. 15). Higher education is not exempt from this argument. For Woodward, Love and Komives (2008a), “change is and has been a fact of life in American higher education” (p. 17). Growth and change has come to higher education through political mandates and social reform, thus expanding the mission of colleges and universities and creating more complex conditions (Birnbaum, 1989; Kerr, 2001) in the higher education environment and administrative structure as well as between members and within the culture (Bess & Dee, 2008a). Bess and Dee (2008a) further noted that internal and external challenges are so extensive and diverse, higher education leaders must develop a cohesiveness that binds the members of the organization to the overall mission and expresses a commitment to the well-being of its individuals. Without cohesiveness

or an organizational identity, the effectiveness and productivity may suffer. To respond, the leader is faced with the overwhelming task of attempting to meet the needs of the organization's personnel in order to "maintain high levels of motivation, commitment, and trust among members" (Bess & Dee, 2008a, p. 5).

As colleges and universities have grown through the years, the administrative structure has evolved in complexity (Birnbaum, 1988). Changes in administrative structure present challenges for all members of the organization (leaders and followers) who seek to achieve success, efficiency, and cohesion (Bess & Dee, 2008b). While managing change, leaders need to recognize that members within the organization have both affective and behavioral reactions to change (Bunker, 2008; Ballinger & Schoorman, 2007; Friedman & Saul, 1991). Bunker has called for leaders within an organization to be sensitive to the ripple effects of change and mindful of common reactions to change by members, noting that the intensity and degree to which one experiences change varies depending on the frequency and complexity of the change.

Ballinger and Schoorman (2007) considered the specific impact of leadership succession on the emotional and behavioral reaction of employees and insist that leaders carefully strategize the introduction of a new leader. Bess and Dee (2008b) stated that change is hindered and overall performance is sacrificed when leaders are not responsive to those they lead. Having a clear understanding of how organizational members or personnel react to disruptions in leadership and changes at the executive level will allow leaders to "customize intervention strategies that maximize the opportunity to bounce back from adversity and move forward in the evolving environment (Bunker, 2008, p. 15).

This dissertation examined how personnel respond to changes in administrative leadership. More specifically, this study considered the response of college and university

student affairs personnel to executive level leadership changes. I sought to better understand how interim periods of leadership affect an individual's quality of work life. Using Farquhar's (1991) aspects of interregnum dynamics as a framework, the purpose of this study was to determine staff reactions to interim leadership in a student affairs organization.

I now examined the unique nature of higher education and student affairs leadership, trends in leadership turnover at the executive level and the impact of turnover to personnel. This next section describes how individuals react to organizational change and leadership succession. In addition, the literature reveals commonly strategies used to fill the leadership gap created when an executive position is vacated. One such strategy used in higher education includes the appointment of an interim leader (Chapman et al., 1988; Grigsby et al., 2009; Inkson et al., 2001; Farquhar, 1995; McWilliam et al., 2008; Mundt, 2004; Rud, 2004). Farquhar's (1991) model of organizational dynamics during leadership will provide the foundation for the method of data collection and analysis outlined in chapter three. The findings of this research will draw attention to the quality of work and experiences of student affairs personnel during interregnum periods of leadership.

Higher Education Leadership

Dressel (1981) studied the work of higher education administrators and concluded that their work is not only complex, but also demanding. Individuals who lead colleges and universities are tasked with managing numerous resources and stakeholders. Effective management of these resources provides for fiscal and educational accountability as well as institutional credibility and prestige. Higher education administrators negotiate with internal and external stakeholders in order to establish common institutional goals (Hughey, 1997; Kerr, 2001). Hughey further suggests that because colleges and universities are so externally driven

and influenced, parallels can be drawn with business and industry leadership strategies in order to accomplish such a task. The large pool of higher education stakeholders, including students, families, governing bodies, funding sources, and society at large, requires a level of accountability, and likens colleges and universities to business and industry.

For these same reasons, however, Dressel (1981) argued that the two are not comparable. He contends that the unique governance and organizational structure, along with the varied type of institutions, and numerous external pressures and influence prevent higher education from being accurately likened to business or industry. He saw the work of higher education administrators as improving society, stating that individuals who manage institutions and organizations coordinate and direct resources to meet both individual and social needs. A true business model of operation does not work in higher education because a college or university “uses tangible resources to produce intangible outcomes and does so by processes that are not well defined, that are highly idiosyncratic to the units and individuals in the processes, and that appear exceedingly inefficient and wasteful to those inured to the directive and controlled procedures more obviously related to outcomes desired” (Dressel, 1981, p. 2). Bess and Dee (2008a) supported the notion that leadership issues in higher education are more complex due to the distinctive characteristics articulated by Dressel. Bess and Dee (2008b) also asserted that colleges and universities are unique because leadership occurs not only at the top, but also throughout the organizational chart. In short, many educators argue about the nature of leadership in higher education. Dressel and Bess and Dee (2008a; 2008b) may accurately describe the unique conditions under which higher education leaders operate, but much can be learned from Hughey’s (1997) suggestion that higher education leadership practices can be informed by business and industry strategies that improve overall organizational effectiveness.

Presidents and executive level leadership are the most commonly studied group in higher education administration. However, according to Birnbaum (1989), measuring effectiveness and success of presidential leadership is challenging due to the decentralized governance structure as well as the quantity and ambiguity of college and university goals (Birnbaum, 1989). Regardless, stakeholders expect leaders to be successful and effective, although these standards of measurement are not articulated. Without clear standards of measurement, leadership success and effectiveness are subjective and dependent upon the perspective of the follower or constituent (Birnbaum, 1989). Gilmore (1990) stated that effective leadership focuses on the “spaces between people and on the environment” (p. 135) Therefore, defining success from the perspective of the stakeholder hinges on the organizational environment the leader creates, the perception of goal achievement, and the lack of internal organizational problems (Birnbaum, 1988; Birnbaum, 1989; Dressel, 1981; Gilmore, 1990; Hughey, 1997; McLaughlin & Riesman, 1990; Pounder, 2001).

Birnbaum (1989), Hoppe and Speck (2003), Hughey (1997), and DeYoung (2000) identified personal traits and characteristics of good academic leaders and the weight of these characteristics when selecting new leaders. Many of the attributes that distinguish leaders as successful are related to leader behavior and interpersonal relationships with subordinates and other constituents. According to Hoppe and Speck (2003), subordinates appreciate leaders who are trustworthy, truthful, supportive, and nurturing. Staff expect leaders to use these characteristics to inspire productivity, maintain staff morale, recognize accomplishments, communicate effectively, and provide individuals with a sense of belonging and high quality of life (Hughey, 1997). Pounder (2001) has considered *cohesion*, “staff morale, interpersonal relationships, team work, and sense of belonging” (p. 284) as critical elements that assist with

assessing and evaluating organizational performance. Other important qualities include integrity, credibility, commitment, and forward thinking. However, adaptability and flexibility was named as the attribute most often credited with successful leadership (Birnbaum, 1989; Hoppe & Speck, 2003; Pounder, 2001). Higher education leaders that adapt and respond through personal self-reflection, often improve not only their own performance and effectiveness, but also that of the organization (Pounder, 2001).

Dressel (1981) agreed that there are many characteristics, such as those stated above, that describe good leaders, but says that ultimately, an effective leader can be defined as having the absence of negative qualities. Subordinates often communicate lack of confidence and perceived incompetence by avoiding or sidestepping the leader. For better or worse, the organizational element of leadership in higher education either stabilizes the environment or perpetuates an unstable situation (Birnbaum, 1988).

Student Affairs Leadership

“There is a strong call for leadership in our profession, but the literature exploring this concept is scant” (Clement & Rickard, 1992, p. 9). As a relatively new field (Thelin, 2003; Thelin, 2004), student affairs studies are rare (Clement & Rickard, 1992; Smith & Hughey, 2006). Most of the studies in higher education leadership focus on university presidents. Clement and Rickard assume that many who study student affairs leadership consider the research on presidents and apply the same standards of measurement. However, authors such as Sandeen (2001), Clement and Rickard, Creamer, Winston, and Miller (2001), and Winston and Creamer (1997), provided practical guides for vice presidents and other student affairs leaders with data gathered from those already serving in the field. The literature produced identifies personal

attributes and organizational elements that are often associated with success and effectiveness as well as current occupational trends.

The Chief Student Affairs Officer (CSAO), defined by Sandeen as (1991) as a senior officer who is “part of the institutional management and leadership team” (p. 4), is an executive among college and university leaders. The CSAO most often reports directly to the president, holds the title of vice president or dean (Sandeen, 1991), and is responsible for the majority student services and experiences outside the classroom (Bess & Dee 2008a). Managing these administrative duties compels a CSAO to have a variety of skills and fulfill multiple roles within the organization. Sandeen (1991) asserts that the strengths and skills of the individual as well as the needs of the institution often dictate the campus expectations and the duties of the CSAO. Therefore, there is no template for a common job description. However, through his studies Sandeen (2001) categorizes the three most prominent functions of student affairs leadership as manager, mediator, and educator. In his research and the research of others, many of the personal attributes that lead to effective leadership are found to fall into these categories.

As a manager, the CSAO maintains accountability for personnel and department and divisional contributions to the institution. In addition, administration of sound fiscal procedures illustrates a well-rounded competence. Being accountable to the institution, staff, and other constituents requires a CSAO to have integrity and high ethical principles while carrying out duties (Clement & Rickard, 1992; Sandeen, 2001; Smith & Hughey, 2006). As with presidents, the effectiveness of the CSAO can often be hailed or criticized based solely on fiscal management (McLaughlin & Riesman, 1990). In addition to administrative accountability, the literature suggests that developed decision-making skills are both respected and necessary to student affairs staff and the other executive level administrators (Brown, 1997; Sandeen, 2001).

As a mediator, Sandeen (2001) believes that the ability to manage conflict is just as valuable for the CSAO as managing departments and resources. He states, “their ability to handle controversy, resolve conflicts, and foster cooperation among competing interests is equally important to their success” (Sandeen, 2001, p. 120). Because CSAOs have this skill set, they are often the primary crisis management officers on campus (Clement & Rickard, 1992; Sandeen, 2001; Smith & Hughey, 2006). Acting as mediator, student affairs leaders often settle conflicts between students, resolve personnel issues, and negotiate disagreements between students and the administration as well as those between departments. During situations that impact the entire institution, such as strategic planning and circumstances that threaten campus safety, effective CSAOs often serve as the primary negotiator and decision maker in times of disagreement and crisis. Because the role of the CSAO in either crisis management or conflict resolution varies, the leader must be skilled in communication strategies that bring together numerous constituents (Brown, 1997; Sandeen, 2001).

In order to educate, a CSAO must stay current in their field and adapt to the ever-changing environment in which they work. Student needs evolve, economic and political factors alter conditions, presidents leave, and staff dynamics change. How a CSAO responds to changes such as these demonstrate leadership effectiveness. A leader that tolerates others, adapts to changing circumstances, and supports staff development functions as an educator (Brown, 1997; Sandeen, 2001). As an educator, the CSAO provides training, support, and information to others so they may be successful. In order to do so, the educator must also stay educated. Staying abreast of current student and campus issues will provide the CSAO with adequate preparation for fulfilling the expectations of others and maintaining competence (Sandeen, 2001).

Many of the attributes necessary for effective student affairs leadership are relational (Creamer et al., 2001; Woodward, Love & Komives, 2000c). Because student affairs leadership occurs at the top and within various levels within the organization, the leader focuses not only on the interaction between leader and follower, but also between those within the organization (Woodward, Love, Komives, 2000c). The success of the CSAO depends on his/her ability to be honest and forthcoming with others, synthesize information and solve conflicts, as well as serve as a conduit for information. Their success “depends on the way the staff performs and the way it is received” (Sandeen, 2001, p. 81). Organizational elements that become important in the fulfillment of the duties of manager, mediator, and educator hinge on the preparation of the CSAO, the organizational structure of the division and the establishment of networks and relationships.

The individuals who work in student affairs come from an educated, professional base. Since the legitimization of the field in the 1970s, many academic preparation programs have been created. Even in entry-level positions, many staff have advanced degrees. Most CSAOs have an earned doctorate (Winston & Creamer, 1997; Sandeen, 2001). The findings of Sandeen (2001) and Creamer et al. (2001) also indicate that successful leaders in student affairs base their practice on a theoretical approach to student learning and campus environments. For the leader, academic preparation develops a comprehension of the issues and challenges facing higher education and a problem solving skill set that generates recognition and acceptance from others in academia.

The literature also suggests that the staffing structure of the student affairs division often impacts effectiveness. Because the scope of Student Affairs organizations is so varied, the CSAO is required to understand and supervise the efforts of many specialized functional areas (Bess &

Dee, 2008a). Sandeen (2001), Smith and Hughey (2006), and Winston and Creamer (1997) all noted that the staffing structure of many student affairs divisions varies depending on the size of the organization and type of institution. In larger institutions, the bulk of the supervision of staff lies with those in the secondary level of the organizational chart, while in smaller institutions, the organizational chart is flatter, allowing the CSAO to directly supervise more individuals. The flatter the organization, the more opportunities there are for staff to have personal contact with and form a relationship with the CSAO. Even though the CSAO has varying degrees of contact with other Student Affairs administrators and staff members, the reach of their leadership extends beyond just those they directly supervise (Bess & Dee, 2008a; Smith & Hughey, 2006; Winston & Creamer, 1997). Sandeen (2001) also noted that student affairs staffing structures, in particular, are subject to frequent changes in order to adapt to leadership desires, institutional mission, and current priorities.

Regardless of the number of administrators that report to the CSAO, Winston and Creamer (1997) indicated that the success of the organization depends largely on the nature of those relationships. It is through these interactions that the flow of information within the division and throughout campus occurs. Clement and Rickard (1992), Guido-DiBrito (1995), and Winston and Creamer (1997) believe that if student affairs personnel understand, trust, and sense a connection to the CSAO, an inter-dependence between the leader and follower develops. It is under these conditions that student affairs personnel improve their own performance, become champions of the leader's vision, and encourage allegiance from others in the division. Because the influence of the CSAO towards the individual and organizational climate affects the organization in such a way, the identity of the division may be defined by the personality of the leader (Winston & Creamer, 1997). A CSAO with a long tenure or an organizational compatible

leadership style creates long term friendships, a stable work environment and loyal networks that enable student affairs administrators to be effective (Dalton & Gardner, 2002).

In summary, student affairs organizations are unique within higher education institutions. Among the main functions of a colleges and university, student affairs organizations are responsible for many specialized administrative departments that provide services and out of classroom experiences that enhance and support academic efforts. The sheer number of units within a single division makes student affairs distinct. Coordinating and managing the efforts of all these departments requires a well-rounded leader and experienced CSAO with a specific skill set. However, there is no one template for the staffing structure. Often the size of the institution dictates the design of the organizational chart. Also, it is noted that the nature of the relationship that the student affairs personnel have with the CSAO impacts their work environment and their productivity (Clement & Rickard, 1992; Guido-DiBrito, 1995; Winston & Creamer, 1997).

Leadership Transitions

Transitions of Personnel in Organizations

Austin and Gilmore (1993) documented that too often the literature focuses on the actual time of sitting permanent leadership and not during the times of transitions. They suggested that due to the brevity of this period, gaining access for the purposes researching the impact of the exit and entrance of a leader presents a challenge. Therefore, according to Austin and Gilmore, the majority of leadership studies consider the middle of the administrator's tenure. In an effort to fill the knowledge gap in this area, these authors, along with Bridges (1986), Gilmore (1990) and Farquhar (1991) considered the periods during leadership transition and succession, including the impact of the exit of the previous leader and entry of the incoming leader to the individual and the organization.

Gilmore (1990) stated that a well-managed leadership transition advances the purposefulness and sustainability of an organization. Although this period often creates uncertainty among individuals within an organization, the interregnum period presents an opportunity for organizational improvement. He stated that with the right leader, the organizational climate created cannot only decrease uncertainty, but also increase productivity and ease individual anxieties.

While studying effective leadership during organizational transitions in nursing administration in higher education, Gilmore (1990) discovered that in the initial phases of assimilation into the organization, the leader experiences two major phases -- *joining* and *building the team*. During the *joining* phase, a leader disengages from their previous job, works through comparisons to predecessor, and begins to develop relationships with existing staff. Likewise, the staff also disengages from the previous leadership. When the staff simultaneously disengages from the previous administration and becomes introduced to the new leader, they may experience a wide range of emotions including guilt, loss, relief, hope, and anxiety (Farquhar, 1991; Gilmore, 1990). The leader must quickly get a sense of the culture of the organization under the previous leader to determine the context from which the staff operates before moving forward with change.

After developing initial relationships and becoming acquainted with the new organization, the leader begins *building the team*. According to Gilmore (1990), the leader quickly assessed the skills and competencies of the staff in order to take “inventory of talent” (p. 139). This allows the leader to identify mission critical organizational roles and connect individuals with tasks and duties aligned with skill sets.

Once the transition phases have passed, the leader then focuses on the incorporation of a new vision, possible reorganization, creating more in depth relationships with staff and supervisor, as well as balancing when and how to incorporate change. Proficiency and attention to the early phases of leadership change allows a leader to become more skilled in transition management, a critical requirement of today's leaders (Gilmore, 1990).

While Gilmore (1990) focused more on the initial phases of leadership transition, Austin and Gilmore (1993), Bridges (1986), and Farquhar (1991) considered the impact of the departure of the previous leader during leadership transitions. Although commonly overlooked, understanding individual and organizational reactions to a leadership departure provides insight to the new leader so they can manage individual reactions, facilitate acceptance, and decrease the likelihood of reductions in employee productivity. Bridges reiterates that circumstances change more quickly than people do, therefore the leader must pay attention to the how the organization and the individuals within the institution plan for and react to change and transition.

Leadership Turnover in Higher Education

McLaughlin and Riesman (1990) studied the means for choosing a college president and the opportunities and constraints upon the process. They found that the search and selection process for replacing higher education leaders has become more political and complex as the number of constituents and institutional responsibilities increase. As a result, the composition of the search committee has come to the forefront as representation of the legitimacy and fairness of the process. Each constituent expects to be represented and heard. To placate and to respect this emerging trend, some institutions have begun to utilize search firms to not only lead the on campus search committee, but to also recruit potential applicants.

The complex nature of the search has also lengthened the time between leaders. McLaughlin and Riesman (1990) used case studies to illustrate other reasons why searches are taking longer to find a successor. In addition to the composition of the search committee, the authors identify that both the quality of the candidate pool and the interviewing process itself prolongs the lapse in leadership. Candidate pools are either too small due to lack of qualified applicants or lack diversity. The interviewing and selection process, which includes phone interviews, campus visits, presentations, and offers and negotiations, requires the coordination of numerous schedules that contributes to the extension of the leadership vacancy (McLaughlin & Riesman, 1990).

Leadership Turnover in Student Affairs

The pressure for high achievement measured against subjective criteria creates a high turnover rate among presidents and other academic leaders (Gilmore, 1990). Rickard (1982), Sandeen (2001), and Smith and Hughey (2006) reported that university presidents and CSAO have the highest turnover rate in higher education, but little research exists that studies the reasons or the impact to the dynamics within the organization. Winston and Creamer (1997) referred to conditions within the environment of the institution that contribute to turnover in student affairs leadership. Because the relationship with the university president or supervisor often dictates the amount of influence the CSAO has on a campus, changes in leadership at that level often disrupt the balance of power. If the CSAO and new president do not develop a working relationship early in the transition, the CSAO may decide to leave (Rickard, 1982). In addition, if the CSAO perceives that his/her leadership style or personality is incompatible with his environment, he feels ineffective in his role and, as a result, often leaves his post (Dalton & Gardner, 2002; Sandeen, 2001). In addition to lack of fit, other professional reasons for student

affairs turnover include stress, occupational burnout, anxiety, and failure to perform. A CSAO may also leave a position for personal reasons, notably health concerns, family needs, and retirement (Dalton & Gardner, 2002; Smith & Hughey, 2006).

The economy may also trigger turnover among CSAOs. When the institution experiences a budget crisis due to decreased enrollment or a reduction in funding, student affairs are often one of the first areas to experience cuts to programs and staff. Dissatisfaction with budget decisions and lack of perceived effectiveness due to the cuts may drive the CSAO to leave the institution (Winston & Creamer, 1997).

Impact of Turnover to Personnel

Bridges (1986) described organizational transitions as a psychological process, experienced by both leaders and followers. Each individual must disengage from the previous situation before accepting the new one. The author stresses that individuals experience more difficulty ending a situation than starting a new one. Ballinger and Schoorman (2007) believe that individual reactions to leadership change are “affective, attitudinal and behavioral” (p.119).

Changes in leadership create organizational conditions that evoke an affective or emotional response in individuals. The more unexpected the turnover, the greater the intensity of the affective response (Ballinger & Schoorman, 2007). Bridges (1986) explained that while individual organization members disconnect from the previous leadership situation, they often experience emotions similar to grief. During this period of bereavement, individuals also experience doubt, anxiety, and confusion as they reevaluate their own value and contribution to the organization (Austin & Gilmore, 1993; Bridges, 1986; Farquhar, 1991). Additionally, for those who stay in the organization during leadership transition, the change “stirs up hopes, fears of abandonment, newly found freedom, and/or anxieties about the impact of change on their own

careers. By contagion from the departing executive, they begin to explore new opportunities for themselves” (Austin & Gilmore, 1993, p. 48).

Existing between an old and new reality not only impacts an individual’s affective response, but also attitudes about the workplace (Ballinger & Schoorman, 2007; Bridges, 1986). Ballinger and Schoorman propose that the affective reaction actually influences an individual’s attitudinal response. Feelings of anxiety and doubt lead to either positive or negative perceptions about the new dynamics within the organization (Ballinger & Schoorman, 2007; Austin & Gilmore, 1993). Individuals become concerned over the balance of power among fellow colleagues and other functional areas within the larger organization. As a result, individuals question their future in the organization and wonder how the change will impact their own careers (Austin & Gilmore, 1993). Even though the period of transition may be difficult, most emerge from despair and begin to accept the new circumstances (Bridges, 1986).

Both affective and attitudinal responses to change influence the workplace behaviors of personnel (Ballinger & Schoorman, 2007). Anxiety and confusion over the new situation may temporarily decrease productivity and effectiveness (Bridges, 1986). As the transition progresses and the organization begins to re-establish a new identity, individuals develop new skill sets and find ways to adapt to the new environment. Once these behaviors are exhibited, Bridges is confident that productivity and effectiveness will begin to increase. Conversely, if individuals within the organization are unsatisfied with the new organizational identity, they may ultimately decide to leave the organization (Ballinger & Schoorman, 2007). Participation in the search process for a new leader may ease anxieties and concerns over the current workplace environment, leaving personnel with feelings of hope and optimism and as well as a sense of value to the organization (Austin & Gilmore, 1993). Appointing an interim leader has become an

increasingly more common strategy used by organizations to assist with the leadership transition and to provide ample opportunity for the identification of the successor (Chapman et al., 1988; Donaldson, 1993; Farquhar, 1991; Farquhar, 1995; Goler, 2003; Goss and Bridson, 1998; Inkson et al., 2008). However, researchers rarely study the use of interim leadership as a variable in examining leadership transitions (Farquhar, 1995).

According to Bess and Dee (2008b), there is a growing body of literature focusing on the impact of leadership succession and organizational performance. They note that “process of changing from one leader to the next may be disruptive and destabilizing” (p. 865) due to changes in organizational structure, strategy, and processes. Although changes in leadership do present an opportunity to reinvigorate an organization, the transition does not always positively impact personnel and performance.

Impact of Turnover to Student Affairs Personnel

While turnover allows the opportunity for renewal and assessment of the contribution of student affairs to the institution, the individuals within the organization may experience stress and anxiety during the transition (Dalton & Gardner, 2002). Dalton and Gardner emphasize that when a CSAO leaves, particularly after a long tenure, student affairs personnel become concerned with how power and resources might be redistributed within in the division and the institution as a whole, as well as their perceived loss of status across campus. In addition, many staff experience apprehension regarding the shifts in duties and responsibilities as well as performance expectations. Because the tenure of CSAOs is becoming shorter and the searches to fill the positions are becoming more complex and lengthy (Chapman et al., 1988), these periods of anxiety are becoming more frequent. Because of this trend, Sandeen (2001) and Rickard

(1982) call for research to determine what happens to student affairs programs during leadership transitions.

Interim Leadership

Goss and Bridson (1998) called attention to the lack of scholarly literature considering the use of interim leaders in the field of business and industry. As a relatively new phenomenon, interim leadership has become a common response to addressing leadership changes within an organization (Farquhar, 1995; Goss & Bridson, 1998; Inkson et al., 2008). This trend has led to greater acceptance and expanded use of the interim leader, spawning professional databases and associations that assist business and agencies with executive interim placement (Donaldson, 1993).

According to Farquhar (1995), a leader who provides short-term leadership to an organization during the “interregnum (the interval between administrations)” (p. 53) so they may conduct an adequate search for a successor provides the organization with a valuable opportunity to re-group. Because the field of interim leadership continues to grow into a legitimate profession, her research focuses on the main purposes of appointing a short term or interim leader, the factors that influence their tenure, and how human resource policy is affected.

Goler (2003), who used Farquhar’s (1991) aspects of the interregnum period to study the appointment of interim directors in non-profit museums, concluded that the interim appointment was critical in the development of the selected leader, but also as an indicator of the health and sustainability of the organization. This research indicates interims assist organizations with competent management of leadership transitions between executive level administrations. Poor management of this critical period results in repetitive leadership turnover, loss of organizational focus, and decreased individual productivity.

In order to put this interim period into perspective, the following section hones in on several key factors of interim leadership. Using organizational circumstances as a lens, the reader should first understand which environmental conditions warrant an interim leader and the options for such an appointment. The literature then reflects upon the reasons why an individual may accept an interim position and the ensuing benefits of such an appointment. Lastly, a small portion of this interim section describes the organizational dynamics associated with interim leadership.

Goals of the Interim

The decision to appoint an interim leader often depends on the circumstances that led to the departure of the former leader (Farquhar, 1995). The precipitating circumstances dictate the terms of the interim leader's employment (Goler, 2003; Goss & Bridson, 1998; Farquhar 1995; Inkson et al., 2001) and has a major influence on the charge and goals of the interim leader (Farquhar, 1995). Executive departure can be planned or unplanned. Both are traumatic to the organization. Planned vacancies occur when an individual accepts another position, retires, or voluntarily resigns. These planned vacancies usually come with a formal announcement of intent, giving the organization time to plan. Unplanned vacancies occur when an individual leaves unexpectedly because they are terminated, pass away, or resign unexpectedly (Farquhar, 1991).

Unplanned and unexpected leadership departures create a crisis within organization, requiring an interim or successor to first diffuse situation. Planned exits may create less of a crisis within the organization, but the interim will need to still spend time stabilizing the uncertain environment (Donaldson, 1993; Farquhar, 1995; Goss & Bridson, 1998). In either case, stabilizing the environment provides the interim leader with the opportunity to change the

organizational culture (Goss & Bridson, 1998), reassess the administrative structure, and clarify organizational values and purposes (Goler, 2003).

Having been charged with stabilizing a crisis and/or the environment, the term of the interim appoint often has specific goals designated by the hiring official (Chapman et al., 1988; Farquhar, 1991; Farquhar 1995; Goler, 2003; Goss & Bridson, 1998; Inkson et al., 2001). Many corporate interims are hired for middle to senior-level management positions in order to provide a missing skill (Goss & Bridson, 1998), coordinate an organizational restructuring, provide additional labor during peak times, or to launch a new company initiative or product (Donaldson, 1993). Additionally, businesses hire interims as resources in cases of “acquisition, disposal and turn-around” (Donaldson, 1993, p. 2). Under these conditions, the individual may have a tremendous impact on the success of the company or organization. However, the ultimate goal of any interim leader is to manage the organizational leadership succession with the intent of preparing both the organization and the individuals within the organization for the permanent leadership appointment (Chapman et al., 1988; Farquhar, 1991; Farquhar, 1995; Goler, 2003; Inkson et al., 2001).

With specific goals that further the organization and prepare those within for leadership succession, the interim serves as more than a placeholder (Farquhar, 1995; Goss & Bridson, 1998; Inkson et al., 2001). Chapman et al. (1988) assert that the interim “is not made to act out, but to perform the regular responsibilities on the interim basis” (p. 84). However, Chapman et al. and Goler emphasize that the interim should have the full authority of the permanent leader in order to be effective and reduce role ambiguity.

Typologies of Interim Leaders

The type of interim leader chosen depends on the environmental conditions of the organization and the purpose of the appointment. To inform the corporate sector and those within human resource management, Farquhar (1995) describes three forms of temporary leadership: acting executive, interim executive, and lame duck. Immediately following the leadership departure, before an interim can be named, an *acting executive* may be appointed. This emergency appointment comes from within the senior ranks of the organization. This individual stabilizes the organization by fulfilling the day-to-day obligations of the position. Having a limited long-range impact due to purpose and brief tenure (days or months), the acting maintains the organization and makes very few changes. The individual, often the next in line or second in command, may vie for the permanent appointment.

The prestige and authority of an *interim executive*, Farquhar's second type, exceeds that of the *acting*. Interims, selected from outside the organization or from the chain of command, have more authority to implement substantive changes. With the charge of readying the organization for the permanent successor, the interim responsibilities may include organizational restructuring, implementing layoffs, making departmental repairs, and providing time for the organization to emotionally recover from the executive departure. The term (months to 1-2 years) of the appointment depends on the readiness of the organization to accept a new leader. Farquhar (1995) noted that the recent trend to hire interim executives has extended beyond corporate settings into higher education administration, non-profits, and churches.

The final form of short-term leadership described by Farquhar (1995) is the *lame duck*. The individual labeled the lame duck already sits in the leadership position. Having announced their departure, but not yet departed, the individual remains in the position until a successor has

been named. No internal or external individual fulfills the duties of the executive during this time. However, the effectiveness of the lame duck decreases. Farquhar (1995) reported that lame ducks are more frequently seen in higher education, politics, and the military than in corporate settings.

Studies conducted by Inkson et al. (2001) contributed to the literature with analysis of four ideal types of interim leaders and their association with the organization. *Core* employees and *careerists* make up the pool of internal candidates. The *core* employee comes from within the organization. His/her strength lies in their specific knowledge of and long standing relationship with the organization. Employees trust this insider with maintaining the organizational culture. The *careerist* may be an insider with an understanding of the organization or field and may or may not presently be employed by the company. This individual associated with the company may be asked to temporarily lead a different functional area within the organization because of their cultural understanding. Those who are specialists in the field may be asked to lead based on their overall understanding of line of work. Goler (2003) adds that the longevity of service, depth of experience and continuity of employment influences whom the board or hiring manager hires.

Pooled workers and *temporary and independent contractors* also provide short-term leadership during interim periods, but they are considered outsiders in relation to the company or line of work (Inkson et al., 2001). The *pooled worker* often interacts frequently with the organization in question to provide “cyclical or seasonal” (p. 261) assistance with organizational changes. This individual, similar to a substitute, may not necessarily replace an outgoing leader, but provide additional executive leadership during peak demands. Also outsiders, *independent contractors*, provide short-term leadership to an organization for specific projects or tasks that

are related to, but not central to the core mission of the company. The individual's ability to network and create social ties with the organization as a whole remains limited.

Benefits of Interim Appointments

Having described conditions that warrant the use of an interim and the different types of short-term leaders, many of the same authors examine the benefits and challenges of interim leadership for both the organization and the individual who serves in the position. An individual who serves in the interregnum provides a stable buffer period between leaders (Farquhar, 1991) so that organization can recover from the crisis created by the loss of the outgoing executive (Chapman et al., 1988; Donaldson, 1993; Goss & Bridson, 1998; Farquhar, 1991; Farquhar, 1995; Inkson et al., 2001). Farquhar (1995) indicates, “ a conservative assumption is that 20-25% of top executive departures are unexpected or problematic, requiring that temporary leadership be immediately installed” (p. 52). With an enthusiastic new perspective, the interim administration encourages self-reflection and assessment in order to make departmental improvements and clarity to organizational goals and values, thus preparing the organization for an incoming leader (Goler, 2003; Inkson et al., 2001).

The organization also benefits from specific skill sets that were lacking in previous leadership or that best prepares employees for change without a long-term employment commitment (Donaldson, 1993; Farquhar, 1995; Inkson et al., 2001). Capitalizing on a specific skill set from a short-term employee saves the company money. Unlike permanent employees, interim compensation often does not include fringe benefits such as health insurance and retirement options, thus providing a cost effective advantage to the appointment. In addition, an interim provides adequate time for the search for a successor, increasing the opportunity for selecting a good match for the company needs. Selecting the best candidate prevents frequent

leadership turnover and increases overall productivity and efficiency, thus saving the company money (Donaldson, 1993; Goler, 2003; Goss & Bridson, 1998; Inkson et al., 2001).

Individuals who accept interim positions also stand to benefit from the arrangement. Inkson et al. (2001) studied the experiences of interim managers and the impact the position had on their careers. The authors discovered that many professionals seek interim appointments as a response to dissatisfaction with current career or life changes. The interim position allows the individual the freedom to explore new options personally and professionally. Personally, the individual benefits from the salary (Goler, 2003; Inkson et al., 2001). If hired from within, the appointment usually provides the individual with extra income. If hired as an outsider with specialized skills, the individual may be well compensated for their short-term employment. Professionally, interim managers gain experience by developing new skills and learning about a new industry. This experience contributes to an individual's career progression, marketability, and future earning potential (Goler, 2003; Inkson et al., 2001). Moreover, Inkson et al. learned that the top overall benefits for the individual includes managerial freedom, flexibility at the workplace, lack of long-term commitment, and forming professional networks.

Inkson et al. (2001) stated that organizations experience very few problems with the interim arrangement in terms of operation. However, these authors acknowledge that the interim appointment may create unintended negative consequences for the leader. For the individual serving in the interim capacity, common experiences include lack of personal fulfillment and job security as well as underdeveloped relationships with colleagues in the company. In addition, when an individual transitions out of the interim appointment to their previous position or out of a job, the circumstances create feelings of uncertainty and stress (Goler, 2003; Inkson et al., 2001).

The Use of Interim Leaders in Higher Education and Student Affairs

As suggested by Farquhar (1995), research in higher education recognizes the increasing trend of using interim administrators. Even though Rickard (1982), Sandeen (2001), and Smith and Hughey (2006) indicated that turnover in higher education most often occurs with university presidents or chief student affairs officers, the limited quantity of research that exists in the area of interim leadership in higher education focuses only on university presidents or academic dean/department heads.

Chapman et al. (1988) noted that the pervasiveness of interim administrators in higher education results from the tendency for institutions to extend and prolong the executive replacement search process, thus lengthening the time between permanent leaders. Except in the case of select presidents, internal appointments to interim positions are the most common in higher education (McWilliam et al., 2008). Mundt (2004), as well as Grigsby et al. (2009), declare that the appointment often serves as a reward for institutional longevity and experience. The vacancy most often occurs when an individual accepts another position, retires, resigns due to illness, passes away, or is forced out (Grigsby et al., 2009).

The charge of the interim varies, depending on the nature of the departure of the outgoing leader. There are two possible assignments of the interim higher education leader: maintain stability or initiate change (Mundt, 2004). Both missions require the interim to guide the leadership transition in preparation for the incoming leader. Mundt argues that members of higher education institutions often overlook the contribution of the interim. She states interim academic leadership “is often an invisible actor in the history of a school or department. However, they are key players in maintaining stability, facilitating change and providing a transitional pathway for the new, permanent leader” (p. 496).

Just as Farquhar (1995) and Inkson et al. (2001) categorize types of interim managers, Rud (2004), while examining the role of the effectiveness of the interim academic chair, does the same for that position. He asserts there are three types of interim leaders in academia: the *aspiring interim chair*, the *beguiled interim chair*, and the *reluctant interim chair*. Each leader brings different skills and motivations to the position. The *aspiring interim chair* consciously seeks opportunities such as these for career progression. As a potential candidate for the permanent position, this type of interim has limited leadership experiences. They hope to get noticed by others by serving in this capacity.

Like the *aspiring interim chair*, the *beguiled interim chair*, considers the position an opportunity for future career advancement. The individual seeks to develop professional administrative experience and fill a skill gap, but does not intend to become a candidate for the permanent position. The *reluctant interim chair* does not intend to seek the permanent position either. However, the individual only serves in the capacity out of a sense of obligation to the department or because they are prohibiting others from assuming the position. Due to lack of motivation, subordinate routines remain undisturbed. However, without proper attention, faculty may become frustrated and less interested in supporting departmental issues (Rud, 2004). Knowing the types of possible interim leaders available in higher education better informs the selection process. Compared to the corporate setting, less research exists regarding the reasons why an individual accepts an interim position in higher education.

There are unique benefits for a leader who accepts an interim appointment in academia. Because many higher education leaders are not specifically trained to lead a college or university, the skills and attributes required and expected are often learned on the job (Hoppe & Speck, 2003; Hughey, 1997; Pounder, 2001). Interim positions provide an opportunity to develop

new skills and gain experience in administration (Grigsby et al., 2009; McWilliam et al., 2008; Mundt, 2004; Rud, 2004). The experience provides insight into the position and allows the individual to explore his or her own interest in moving up, while building a resumé (Rud, 2004). The motivation to become a senior level administrator may be inspired from the interim experience (Dressel, 1981).

The overall benefits of interim administrators to higher education organizations have yet to be studied. Rud (2004) assumes some general advantages: organizational stability, motivation to staff, assistance with recovery efforts resulting from the departure of the former leader, and assessment of the mission and goals of the department. Grigsby et al. (2009) come closest to providing a substantial reason why interims are used in higher education. They state that interims offer the organization the opportunity to thoughtfully and deliberately plan for leadership succession. Having time to conduct thorough searches for the best candidate positively impacts the organization in the long run. If a competent interim were not appointed to lead, the search process would be rushed and might result in a poor selection.

Because the topic has yet to be researched in depth, challenges of interim leadership are unsettled. Again, Rud (2004) assumes that interim leadership hinders the ability to make long-term decisions in the areas of hiring new faculty and strategic planning. But the lack of perceived organizational productivity and progress may impact the satisfaction of other employees. Additionally, McWilliam et al. (2008) claim that productivity may decrease and workload increase if the appointed individual comes from within the organization because there are fewer individuals to handle the workload.

Framework: Farquhar's Effects of Interims on Personnel

Although the research has yet to discover many organizational problems associated with an interim situation, Farquhar (1991) studied the impact of the arrangement on the personnel or those who report directly to the interim. As mentioned earlier, transitions in leadership cause organizational crises (Bridges, 1986; Farquhar, 1991; Farquhar, 1995; Gilmore, 1990). As a result, the impact and ripple effect of the transition extend well beyond company productivity and the burden of a search for a successor. The majority of those within the organization that experience the crisis are the personnel most affected by change in leadership. Farquhar (1991) analyzed the organizational dynamics during interim administrations and established four aspects of interim dynamics that impact staff: the incumbent's departure, the search process, the events of the interregnum, and the new executive's entry. These four aspects provide the framework for this study.

The Incumbent's Departure

"The circumstances surrounding the incumbent's departure determine employee emotions and expectations at the outset of an interregnum" (Farquhar, 1991, p. 203). In order to fully understand the impact of the departure, she notes that it is important to examine the way in which the incumbent left the organization and the members reaction to such, the overall assessment of their leadership style, and frequency of executive turnover within the organization. Important factors, while capturing the nature of the departure, include the tenure of the leader, the way the departure was announced to the organization, how quickly the incumbent left after the departure was announced, and the level of satisfaction of the work environment by the staff when they left.

The nature of the departure can be planned or unplanned and the reactions by staff vary accordingly. Common reactions include stress, surprise, chaos, and loss. These reactions impact

morale, performance, and career stability. Farquhar noted that the more negative the departure, as described by the staff, the more stress and chaos they experienced. However, they reported less of a sense of loss to the organization as whole when the incumbent departed.

While evaluating the previous leader, Farquhar (1991) found that many staff focused on the shortcomings of the incumbent and a desire for the incoming to possess different qualities. In addition, staff in organizations with higher executive turnover reported, “less positive relationships with the directors, sought change, and were more receptive to the newcomer” (p. 206) or interim. Although, not privy to how staff perceived the incumbent prior to the departure, she noted an overall “degree of negativity towards the departing executive” (p. 207), especially when the circumstances surrounding the departure are perceived as negative.

The Search Process

The second key dimension, named by Farquhar (1991), which impacts the organizational dynamics during an interim administration, involves the search process. “The process of selecting a new executive engages the entire organization and is a major concurrent focus of attention during the interregnum” (p. 203). She found that the search process facilitates an assessment of organizational values and goals, whereby members clarify the direction of the department and the expectations of new leadership. In order to grasp the impact of the search process on the staff during interim leadership appointment periods, Farquhar “focused on descriptive information about the search, ratings of the staff role in the search and of the effects of the search (including the impact of insider candidacies), and the staff’s expectations of the newcomer” (p. 203). Important factors that emerged included the length of the search process, the number of staff and composition of the committee, the presence of internal candidates, and the satisfaction with the applicant pool.

In her study, Farquhar (1991) found that staff were highly interested in participating in the search process and being made aware of the conditions and progress of the search. In this study, many staff also had the opportunity to be involved. Being involved, aware and interested in the search suggest that staff also felt as though they played a critical and valuable role in selecting a new leader. Although most staff positively rated the search process, stating the experience unified the department, others stated that the process created division and low productivity. The presence of an internal candidate also impacted the way the staff perceived the search process. Internal candidates did not negatively impact the rating of the quality of applicants but may contribute to division among staff and the level of stress experienced by staff during the search process.

The Events of the Interregnum

The third dimension considered by Farquhar (1991) focused on the dynamics during interim administrations. Research in this area lays the foundation for studying “employee attitudes during the interregnum and on the longer lasting effects of their responses to the executive’s departure and the acting administration” (p. 204). She focused her efforts on the state of the organization in which the interim inherits, the qualifications of the interim leader, and the staff ratings of the overall experience of the interim period.

Many interim periods were plagued with substantive change, numerous initiatives, or problems within the organization. Although these conditions were rated as stressful by the staff, it did not impact the positive reception of the interim leader into the organization. Staff actually rated the interim administrator more favorably than the incumbent. Farquhar (1991) suggests that this “hints that interregna act as buffer between permanent administrations, allowing the organization to work through the process of executive transition” (p. 207), noting however, that

internal candidates who serve as the interim complicate this assertion. Overall, the interim administration received a favorable rating but did not leave a long lasting effect to the organization.

The New Executive's Entry

The final dimension considered by Farquhar (1991) concentrates on the entry of the permanent executive. This final phase of interregnum dynamics occurs as the interim and new executive exchange posts. It is important to note how staff perceive and/or experience this transition. In later research, using this study as a foundation, Farquhar (1995) finds that the success of the interim depends on how well the organization was prepared for the successor. The ease of the transition of the new executive into the position and the amount of time taken to achieve organizational equilibrium indicate the overall impact of the interim. Farquhar (1995) suggests more research be conducted that examines links between the actions of the interim and the success of the new executive to determine the impact to the organization.

Summary

Very little information has been gathered concerning the individual responses and organizational dynamics during interim administration in higher education and student affairs. Of the known studies that consider the perspective of the staff during interim leadership, only two (Grigsby et al., 2009; McWilliam et al., 2008) are from higher education. They both refer to the impact of interim academic chairs or deans, even though the literature suggests that college and university presidents and CSAOs have the highest turnover (Rickard 1982; Sandeen, 2001; Smith & Hughey, 2006).

Colleges and universities as organizations are constantly evolving. As a result, higher education leaders change and adapt to not only fulfill the purposes of the institution but also to

meet the needs of the individuals within the organization. In a student affairs organization the relationship between leader and follower and the relationships between members influence levels of productivity as well as an individual's quality of work life. Changes in leadership often disrupt the work environment and effect behaviors and attitudes among organizational members.

When an organization appoints an interim leader to assist with leadership succession, as is common in higher education and student affairs, there can be benefits to the leader and the organization. The interim gains skills and experiences that will further their personal career. The organization is better prepared to accept a new leader after the interim either stabilizes the environment or make necessary changes that improve the organization. The reactions of the personnel in higher education organizations with an appointed interim leader have yet to be studied in depth. The use of corporate and public administration literature on this topic provides a foundation for the study of this subject.

CHAPTER III: RESEARCH METHODS

This study examined the staff reactions and organizational dynamics in a student affairs organization during an interim leadership period. Many note that the turnover rate among CSAOs is one of the highest in colleges and universities (Rickard, 1982; Smith & Hughey, 2006). Although the effects of turnover have not specifically been studied in higher education or student affairs, several authors have examined human relations and the impact of leadership change within organizations in general (Austin & Gilmore, 1993; Ballinger & Schoorman, 2007; Bess & Dee, 2008b; Bridges, 1986; Chapman et al., 1988; Donaldson, 1993; Farquhar, 1991; Farquhar, 1995; Goler, 2003; Goss & Bridson, 1998; Inkson et al., 2008). Notable reactions to leadership succession include changes in affect, attitudes, and workplace behaviors (Ballinger & Schoorman, 2007). A trend in higher education that responds to gaps in permanent executive leadership is the appointment of an interim leader (Chapman et al., 1988; Farquhar, 1995; Grigsby et al., 2009; McWilliam et al., 2008, Mundt, 2004; Rud, 2004). Even though the trend has been noted, the effects of the interim period from the perspective of the staff have yet to be studied (Farquhar, 1991; Rickard, 1982; Sandeen, 2001). Studying leadership change from a relational perspective is important for student affairs organizations because, as noted, the relationships between leaders and followers as well as between individuals in student affairs have an impact on the organizational effectiveness and the work environment (Bess & Dee, 2008b; Clement & Rickard, 1992; Sandeen, 1991). This study examined the individual reactions and organizational dynamics within the context of an interim leadership appointment in a student

affairs division. Specifically, the research question is: What are staff reactions to interim leadership in a student affairs organization. This chapter outlines the research design and rationale, the site selection, data collection and analysis, limitations, and the role of the researcher in this dissertation.

Research Design and Methodology

Marshall and Rossman (2006) state that qualitative research focuses on: “(a) individual lived experience, (b) society and culture, and (c) language and communication” (p. 55). Because this research involves the personal experiences of a single group of individuals within a specific context in a their natural environment, a qualitative single site case study was carried out (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Merriam (2009) notes that a qualitative study focuses on meaning and understanding from individual perspectives, is richly descriptive, and uses the researcher as the primary instrument of data collection. This dissertation used qualitative data collection methods such as interviews, group observations, and document analysis (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2009) to understand a “real-life phenomenon in depth” (Yin, 2009).

“A case study is an in-depth description of a bounded system” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 42). Because this study is exploratory in nature and hopes to answer a “what” research question, an application of Yin (2009) deems a case study the most appropriate research method. The study was inductive, in that theories about the experience were built from the data, rather than tested against a known hypothesis (Merriam, 2009).

Site Selection

Finding an appropriate site for this study was critical. In order to study the personnel reactions to interim leadership period in a student affairs organization, the division needs the following characteristics: a recently departed CSAO, an interim leader appointee, and personnel

who are impacted by both. Austin and Gilmore (1993) state that researchers most often study the impact of leadership succession after the transition has already occurred. They further assert that more research should be conducted during the actual time of sitting leadership in order to gain knowledge about how the members in the organization are affected. Therefore, for this study, it was important to identify a college or university that had a sitting interim leader. In order to collect enough data, members of the organization must have frequent contact with the CSAO. In smaller colleges and universities, student affairs organizations are flatter. The flatter the organizational chart, the more personnel that have contact with the CSAO. Larger institutions have fewer individuals who report directly to the CSAO or have regular contact (Bee & Dee, 2008a; Smith & Hughey, 2006; Winston & Creamer, 1997). As a result, the criteria for selecting a site for the case study hinged on a current interim CSAO appointment and the type and size of the institution.

The following table depicts the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (2010) four-year college and university classification by undergraduate FTE enrollment (number of students), regardless of residential status.

Table 1

Carnegie Classification of Four-year Institutions by Undergraduate FTE Enrollment

Institution type	Number of students
Very small	fewer than 1,000
Small	1,000 – 2,999
Medium	3,000 – 9,999
Large	at least 10,000

A review of public colleges and universities in the southeastern region of the United States with less than 10,000 students was conducted in order to identify potential sites for the case study. Then, in order to identify a purposeful sample, the researcher, using professional association and personal networks, contacted higher education administrators who had knowledge of the student affairs administrative structure and of organizations with current interim CSAOs. The search was further narrowed to identify organizations with interim CSAOs who were recently appointed. The rationale for these two criteria serves three purposes. First, institutions with fewer than 10,000 students are more likely to have flatter student affairs organizational charts. With flatter organizational charts, more staff interact directly with the CSAO and potentially experience the impact of the interim appointment. Secondly, studying the reactions to interim leadership as it occurs allows the researcher to gather data in the natural setting to the individual and the group. Having gathered data that has yet to be processed or reflected upon allows the researcher to obtain raw unfiltered data. Lastly, organizations with recently appointed interim leaders allows the researcher to capture real time reactions to the CSAO departure as well as the events of the interregnum.

After speaking informally to student affairs colleagues, an institution that met the prescribed criteria emerged as a candidate for the site selection. In order to protect the identity of the institution and of the student affairs administrators, the institution name and identity of the staff have been masked. For this study, I will refer to the institution as Southeastern State University. This public, mid-sized, regional institution had a recently appointed CSAO due to the resignation of their vice president, Dr. Joan Jensen. The Assistant Vice President for Student Affairs, Mr. Drew Lawson assumed the interim role. This was the second time that this individual would be asked to serve in this capacity. The first time he was appointed was in 2006,

by then president Robert Westbrook. Lawson served from January of 2006 to January of 2007, until a permanent CSAO was appointed. In 2009, a new president, Dr. Ruth Taylor, was appointed to lead the university. When Jensen resigned in September 2010, Taylor asked Lawson to again take the helm of student affairs. Lawson was not a candidate for the position in 2006, nor was he this time. During the time of data collection, the organization was four months into a ten-month interim appointment and in the search process for a permanent appointment.

Southeastern State University is affiliated with a state university system and is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. The institution is classified as a public, four-year university with an undergraduate enrollment of over 6,500 students. There are over 300 full-time instructional faculty and more than 200 employees classified as administration and/or support staff. Within the student affairs division, there are eleven departments with a total of twenty-eight full-time administrators or staff members. The CSAO's title is Vice President of Student Affairs and the position is among the four vice presidents and three other executives that report directly to the president. Financial data gathered indicates that Southeastern has an endowment of \$2,171,793 with \$392 per FTE. Specific to student affairs, the self reported student services budget represents 6.86% of the core expenses.

Statistics retrieved from the institution's website indicate that in the Fall 2010 semester enrollment totaled almost 8000 students, about 90% of which were undergraduates, a slight overall increase from 2009. Of these students, 68% are full time, 66% are female, 86% are in state residents, and 63% come from immediate surrounding counties. Student average age is higher than the traditional 18-24 year old student. Currently, the average age of a Southeastern undergraduate student is 25 while graduate students average at 33 years of age. Reported statistics indicate that 38% of Southeastern students receive loans and 77% have some type of

grant aid. The institution has a 30% overall graduation rate for first-time, full-time, degree seeking undergraduate students.

Data Collection

As noted earlier, the scope of a case study includes an in-depth examination of an experienced phenomenon within the confines of a bounded system or context (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2009). By nature, qualitative research

1. Takes place in the natural world;
2. Uses multiple methods that are interactive and humanistic;
3. Focuses on context;
4. Is emergent rather than tightly prefigured; and
5. Is fundamentally interpretive (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 3).

To complete case study inquiries, Yin (2009) recommends that researchers rely “on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion” (p. 18). One source alone limits the inquiry and prevents the researcher from excluding valuable data that would otherwise describe the phenomenon. For the purposes of this study, the selected student affairs organization served as the unit or phenomenon of analysis and the data was collected through a series of interviews as well as group observations and document analysis.

Triangulation of the data ensured credibility of the findings and trustworthiness of the study (Merriam, 2009).

Interviews

Marshall and Rossman (2006) asserted that the use of interviews as a method of data collection “is based on an assumption fundamental to qualitative research: the participant’s perspective on the phenomenon of interest should unfold as the participant views it, not as the

researcher views it” (p. 101). In addition, interviewing a person who is experienced and knowledgeable about the topic provides valuable insight and perspective for the research (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). For this dissertation, fifteen participants who had regular contact with the Chief Student Affairs Officer were selected from the student affairs professional staff at the chosen site to be interviewed. Because this particular division had a relatively flat organization, many staff members report directly to the CSAO. Therefore, direct report personnel were recruited to participate first. In addition, because literature concludes that student affairs organizations are dependent on the relationship between the leader and staff members, other student affairs personnel who have regular, frequent contact with the CSAO were asked to participate. To gain contextual knowledge about the interim leader, change history, change process, and expectations of the term, and as a courtesy, the interim CSAO was also interviewed.

The initial interviews were conducted in person in the winter of 2011 and continued until data saturation was achieved. Interviews conducted in person were recorded. Each participant was interviewed for approximately one hour during the site visit. Interviews were conducted in the initial phases of the research and continued through the data collection period. The interview protocol was constructed using Farquhar’s (1991) framework and revised based on participant responses. Questions regarding the departure of the CSAO, the search process, the interim period and the entry of the new CSAO were asked. Appendix A presents the study’s interview protocol with added questions.

Observations

Data collected through interviews provides a first-hand account of the experience being studied. Data gathered through observation allowed the researcher to study behaviors and interactions of participants in an informal and naturally occurring setting (Marshall & Rossman,

2006; Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2009). Marshall and Rossman state that observations are “used to discover complex interactions in natural social settings” (p. 99). Observing personnel in their work environment provided the ideal setting for examining the interactions of the student affairs personnel. Observations included in this study targeted regularly scheduled, work-related meetings of the participants. In this case, the researcher observed a student affairs director’s meeting and an all-division staff meeting. Both the interview data and the literature informed the observation protocol. Observation of the director’s meeting occurred during the initial site visit after several interviews had been conducted. Observation of the all-division staff meeting occurred approximately two weeks after the interviews were conducted. The data collected during the interviews informed the researcher about the perspectives of the individual participants.

Document Analysis

The use of document analysis in case studies provides “knowledge of the history and context surrounding the specific setting” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 107). Merriam (2009) stated that data collected during document analysis is unaltered by the presence of the researcher. This data usually plays a supportive role to the findings of interviews and observations. However, the researcher must be skilled in determining the relevance and usefulness of the emergent data. Documents analyzed were relevant to the study and included the organizational chart of the institution and of the student affairs division, the resignation email to the student affairs staff from the CSAO, and the campus-wide email announcement from the university president about the resignation of the CSAO and the interim appointment of the Assistant Vice President. In addition, the university web site designated to the search for a permanent appointment provided information regarding the timeline of the search and the make-up of the

search committee. Documents were provided by interview participants and obtained from the institution's web site. Document analysis occurred throughout the data collection phase.

Data Analysis

“Collection and data analysis should be a simultaneous process in qualitative research” (Merriam, 2009, p.169). Therefore, data collected in this study were constantly compared throughout the study to improve the data collection process (Merriam, 2009). Data gathered from interviews and observations were reviewed regularly and consistently to adapt the interview protocol and the focus of the research in order to better “organize and refine” (Merriam, 2009, p. 171) data collection. In addition, being flexible and adaptive allowed patterns and themes to emerge from the data.

Data analysis was concurrent with data collection. A contracted transcriptionist transcribed the interviews and formatted them into Microsoft Word. To assist with data analysis, the researcher utilized Atlas.ti 6.2 software to organize interview transcripts, observation field notes, and documents by codes that were informed by the conceptual framework and the literature. Continued analysis expanded upon the initial codes. Like codes were combined, reordered, and organized into thematic groups. This process allowed the researcher to understand and explain reoccurring reactions and experiences among participants.

Once coding was complete and themes were identified, the researcher began to strategically interpret the data for meaning. According to Merriam (2009), “data analysis is the process of making sense out of the data. And making sense out of the data involves consolidating, reducing and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read” (p.176). Assigning meaning to the themes allowed the articulation of the dynamic experiences of the participants and helped to answer the research question.

Limitations

One of the main criticisms of qualitative research is that the information may not be generalized beyond the individual phenomenon studied (Yin, 2009). Although the findings in this case may not be generalizable, Marshall and Rossman (2006) assert that qualitative “findings may be transferrable” (p. 42). Because this study was confined to the context of this particular student affairs organization, the findings were just as specific. For the findings to be transferrable, the reader will need to determine how useful the findings are to future research and student affairs practice in other settings.

Because the study was conducted prior to a new vice presidential appointment, studying all four aspects of Farquhar’s framework presented a challenge due to the timing of the study. Farquhar examined trends among numerous leadership transitions over a four-year period from the interim appointment through the new executive’s entry. This study was conducted four months into the ten-month interim appointment. Although possible to capture the reaction to the departure of the CSAO, the events of the interregnum, and to some extent an individual’s knowledge of and expectations of the search process less than one-third of the way through the appointment, it was challenging to understand the reaction to the entry of the permanent leader, as it had yet to occur. Focus in that area was adapted in order to complete the study in a timely fashion.

The participants of this study included the interim vice president of student affairs and professional student affairs staff who had frequent contact with the CSAO. Data was not collected from the incumbent vice president or the university president. While the study may not have benefitted from interviewing the incumbent, the study was limited because the president was not a participant. As the hiring official, only she could have provided clarity on the decision

to appoint this particular core employee to serve as the interim and the extent of his authority and charge.

Role of the Researcher

As the primary instrument of data collection and analysis (Merriam, 2009), it is important to note my professional background and professional connection to some of the student affairs staff members. Professionally, I have worked in higher education for twelve years; seven of those have been in student affairs administration. As a result, previous work-related experiences have allowed me to professionally cross paths with several of the individuals on the staff. My expertise in student affairs administration and professional experience is relevant and helpful to the study.

These relationships I had with several staff members at Southeastern State University not only helped me gain access to the institution in order to conduct research, but also assisted with the interviews, observations, and the procurement of necessary documents. Having relationships with staff in the division created a more comfortable, conversational interview process, increased my credibility among the staff, and decreased biases of the respondents (Yin, 2009).

Trustworthiness

To ensure trustworthiness, qualitative studies require the researcher to utilize techniques that emphasize “rigor in data collection, in cross-checking, and in intercoder consistency” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 205). Acceptable techniques, as described by Merriam (2009), that were used by the researcher included rich, thick descriptions of the experiences of the participants, member checks of the transcriptions, and triangulation of the data.

Triangulation of Data

“Probably the most well known strategy to shore up the internal validity of a study is what is known as *triangulation*” (Merriam, 2009, p. 215). Yin (2009) considers triangulation to be “a major strength of case study data collection” (p. 114) by which researchers use multiple sources of data to “confirm emerging findings” (Merriam, 2009, p. 229). In this study, interviews were conducted in order to draw out individual reactions to and experiences of the interim leadership period. Observations served as an opportunity to study participant behaviors in a naturally occurring work setting with others who are also experiencing the interim leadership period. Document analysis allowed the researcher to gain knowledge of the institutional and organizational contexts, personally review how and what information was communicated between individuals in the organization, and understand the search process. Triangulation, using these methods, increased the generalizability or usefulness, dependability, and confirmability of the findings (Merriam, 2009).

CHAPTER IV:

RESULTS

This research examines the experiences of professional student affairs staff during an executive interim leadership appointment. The descriptions and perceptions of their experiences are presented in order to better understand how the appointment, within this particular campus environment, impacts work efforts, organizational dynamics, and individual expectations for the future. This study uses Farquhar's framework of organizational dynamics during interim leadership periods to explore staff reactions to such an occurrence. Using this framework as the foundation for the interviews, observations, and document analysis conducted for this study, the results presented describe how these student affairs professionals at Southeastern State University experience leadership in transition.

The findings reported are from the perspective of those individuals who serve under the interim leader as well as the interim leader. In order to contextualize the interim appointment and the reactions to the phenomenon, the results presented begin with a review of the campus circumstances that precipitated the incumbent departure and interim appointment. Then, in keeping with the conceptual framework, the individual reactions and organizational dynamics of the student affairs staff are presented in a similar organizational structure as Farquhar (1991). However, an additional theme, the interim's charge, emerged from the data and was consistent with Mundt's (2004) study of interim leadership appointments. Therefore, the data is arranged using the following themes:

- Theme One: The Incumbent's Departure
- Theme Two: The Events of the Interregnum
- Theme Three: The Interim's Charge
- Theme Four: The Search Process
- Theme Five: The New Executive's Entry

Precipitating Circumstances

In 2009, Dr. Ruth Taylor was named president at Southeastern State University. Her appointment from the chancellor of the university system came when her predecessor retired from the presidency after nine years of service. During his tenure, the university experienced generally prosperous economic conditions that allowed for growth in student enrollment and academic programs, the reestablishment of on-campus housing, and several modest construction projects. Upon retirement, all executive cabinet positions were filled with permanent leaders, many of whom had been hired during the later part of his term. Within approximately the first eighteen months of Taylor's tenure, several top level executive leaders, including the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Assistant Vice President for Academic Affairs, Vice President for External Affairs, Vice President for Student Affairs, and Associate Vice President for Enrollment Management, either left the institution or assumed other positions on campus. The Vice President for Business and Finance and the Assistant Vice President for Student Affairs were the only enduring executives from the previous administration. The president responded with internal interim appointments for the majority of the vacancies created by the resignations or terminations, including the Vice President for Student Affairs, Dr. Joan Jensen. In this case, the Assistant Vice President for Student Affairs, Mr. Drew Lawson, was named as the interim leader.

The numerous changes in leadership did not go unnoticed among the student affairs staff. As one administrator recalls, “There has been a lot of change going on within the university. There was a lot of realignment of responsibilities and of duties early on in the president’s tenure.” These leadership changes, while occurring frequently at the cabinet level, have also extended into the ranks of other high level executives. A staff member noted,

There has also been some movement in the in the assistant VP and dean ranks, and if you look at the organizational chart from 4 years ago, or even 3, and look at the organizational chart now, most all of the deans are either new or there’s a vacancy... also lots of vacancy in the assistant dean ranks.

He further explained that there is less movement among leaders at the mid-level management rank and below.

Although the turnover occurred mostly at the top, the frequency had some staff concerned. One relatively new assistant director shared his concern over the unstable environment created by the amount of leadership turnover. Even employees with longer tenures expressed anxiety. A director with over twenty years at the institution said,

I guess we’re a little bit anxious about what we don’t know. We’ve seen some people disappear too...we’ve seen positions eliminated, people who have been with the University a long time, not quite as long as me, let go.

While disconcerting to some, most staff accepted that replacing top level administrators is a common practice for new university presidents and is just part of the transition. Even throughout the various levels of staff within the division, there was a clear understanding of this custom. One director indicated that the cue from Dr. Taylor came very early in her tenure asserting, “Um, I think it became obvious to everyone when the new president arrived... after 2-3 months, she started encouraging or requiring vice presidents to go.” Another staff member from the student life department recognized the prevalence and possible reasons by stating,

I think these things happen when new presidents, new administrations come into

play in the first place...people weren't hired by that person, they don't necessarily match with that person's approach or vision.

Many staff agreed with one mid-level manager, who claimed that presidents "generally want their own people, even if you are good and effective. I think they want their own hire. They don't want the inherited staff." Such was the case with Dr. Joan Jensen, the Vice President for Student Affairs. In short, the staff recognized that presidential turnover is often followed by successive changes among top-level administrators because each president has his/her own agenda. In order to accomplish these objectives, presidents seek out cabinet members who can best serve these interests. Existing executives are often the casualties of presidential turnover.

The Incumbent's Departure

Dr. Jensen was hired by the former university president and had served as the vice president for almost four years. She left in September 2010, just fourteen months after the new university president assumed the helm. By most accounts, she most likely left on her own accord, but was the last of the executive cabinet, aside from the Vice President of Business and Finance, to leave her post. Staff frequently interpreted the departure as cordial and professional but chalked it up to incompatibility. When asked to comment on the reason Jensen left, a student affairs administrator stated,

I believe it was probably a bad fit between the she and the president. I think there was a philosophical leadership gap between the two, and ultimately I think the Vice President for Student Affairs decided that she wanted to look at opportunities that would be better fit for her.

Because Jensen "was an astute person," one department head thought it was wise of her to "be proactive and leave on her own terms." Leaving on their own terms was a luxury that other executive administrators had not experienced. As a result, several staff members respected her decision to leave and considered her departure a loss. Others would later reveal that they were

relieved and even thrilled with her announcement.

Other campus conditions relevant to the staff that were occurring just prior to Jensen's departure and the appointment of the interim included statewide budget cuts, unprecedented enrollment, new construction projects, staffing issues, and a "tumultuous relationship with her business VP counterpart." When discussing what Jensen left behind for the interim to handle, members of the housing staff were particularly concerned with the conflicts between the aforementioned vice president. Not only was there "friction" between them, but also the breakdown in the working relationship between the two trickled down below mid-level management. As a result of the conflicts between student affairs and the VP for business and finance, at least three housing staff members were terminated, including the director. Other staffing issues and problematic vacancies emerge later in the chapter.

The Incumbent's Tenure

When asked about the length of her tenure, staff had mixed reactions. For those who had a favorable opinion of her, such as those in recreation and student life, her tenure was "very short" and her departure was "sudden" and a surprise "because she hasn't been there that long." In comparison to other individuals in similar positions, one director stated, "Normally, vice presidents move around or move up after 5 to 7 years, that would be a normal stint even if you were at one institution and you wanted to go to a bigger place. You generally would not go after just 4 years." Another director added, "I talked to a couple of faculty members that thought it was very short and that you know, it would be nice to have somebody that would stay awhile." Conversely, staff that did not favor Jensen and were relieved by her departure thought she was at Southeastern "for a really long time." Still, the majority of the division seemed unconcerned with her rate of turnover relative to length of service.

During Jensen's tenure, she led several efforts to contribute and respond to the growth on campus. In Dr. Taylor's email announcing Jensen's departure to the campus, she summarized,

During her tenure, the Division of Student Affairs has successfully created a regional student leadership conference, led the construction of a new student union, opened new residential facilities, and established a comprehensive recreation and wellness department. Dr. Jensen has advocated for students and has worked to create numerous enhanced experiences for them.

Other staff members were also complimentary of her accomplishments. One long time staff member who had also worked under Jensen's predecessor said, "I think she did more in two years in many ways than that previous person had done for a decade. She was very good for our University." For another, her achievements,

obviously advanced the institution... a new student union, new freshman housing. All those things, whether they started in her purview or not, they were completed under her purview. So I feel solid about that. There was evidence that she spent a lot of time at the table for our slice of pie, and I think that was important.

Other staff members recognized that the construction projects, while they positively contributed to growth on campus, also presented challenges in "trying to keep up with everything else."

Other service functional areas such as counseling and disability services that did not benefit directly from her accomplishments had a different view. In one interview, an administrator suggested that her area lacked support because "Dr. Jensen came in and had a couple of focus areas that she really, totally focused on. And of course buildings were one of her main areas." It was also in these two functional areas that personnel levels were intentionally decreased either by termination of staff or reducing the annual contract time to ten months. A student affairs administrator from outside these departments said of this move, "I know a couple of the people that left our institution were encouraged to do so by Dr. Jensen."

The Incumbent's Leadership Style

Of Jensen's overall leadership style, responses were mixed. Many would agree that she was very direct with her staff and decisive about issues of concern, soliciting feedback from others only on occasion. While respected or tolerated by some, this approach was too forceful and lacked compassion for others. This "very direct, very systematic, very structured approach" appealed to at least three interviewed women because it was effective and efficient. One of the women stated,

I really appreciated how direct and honest she was. It was just sort of, "I'm in charge of this division and this is what has to happen and I'm going to tell it to you right to your face and you know we're all just going to move on. You know, there's not going to be any back and forth and talking behind my back."

This leadership characteristic is what some liked best about her. In a conversation with another female director, she recalled that Dr. Jensen,

had a very different style and a very different approach to leadership. She was really business oriented. She was more of an executive leader. Not necessarily a private sector approach, but very cost effective, budget oriented.

The interim could appreciate the consistency in her approach because, as he stated, "I was crystal clear on what her expectations were. I knew what she would not get wound up about if something was missed or dropped versus something that was really critical to her."

However, Jensen's decisive and direct tactics were not well received by all in the division. Although they initially came as a surprise, the methods were described as "dominating" and even "fear-based." As one director put it,

She was a fear-based person who had real issues about submission and dominance. I first saw this in her in a meeting where I was in with a bunch of people and she was very disrespectful to people that supervised her because she was busy showing how much she was in charge...you know and was cutting them off and whatever... And I came back and said damn, this is a fear-based person. I thought she was relaxed and nice, but she's not. She's fear based. Fear based people tend to act in anger, they have control issues.

This approach manifested itself in both individual and joint director meetings. One director described encounters with Jensen as “cut and dry, and to the point.” According to several staff members, she expected that staff be able to both follow directives and resolve their own issues.

One coordinator, who described Jensen as a “dictator” said of one on one meetings,

She would tell you what to do and then expect it to be done. There wasn't really any discussion about it. Now if you had a problem and came to her, she wanted to know all the different situations of how it could be handled. She didn't want to just solve the problem for the you, she wanted you to bring your ideas of how it could be solved.

This was confusing for another director because he was unclear whether he was going to be empowered or micromanaged, depending on the nature of the problem. He recalled,

Uh, she put me through some of that to the point where I wasn't sure where I stood. It was like you're fine as long as you don't give her any problems. If anything comes where she's sees there's a problem, and suddenly you have to be micromanaged, you have no brain, you have no capacity. You have to have someone look over your shoulder in a very parental way and treat you with total disrespect.

An attendee of direct report meetings indicated these were similar to individual meetings in that,

She would tell us what was going to happen. She didn't ask for feedback. For example, when they made the changes in our building here, she would just give us the information she wanted us to know. She didn't ask what we thought. You would think she confer with the directors and see what would be beneficial.

One director, who knew Jensen personally and professionally, defended this approach by arguing that her leadership style was different with every staff member. She assessed that Jensen “probably started out more hands on and then once she kind of saw that you had a handle on what you were doing, then she would pretty much let you go in whatever direction you felt necessary.”

The direct and straightforward communicative style led several staff members to consider her leadership to be non-inclusive. It was not her style to solicit feedback often. Once again, the response was mixed. One director understood that Jensen,

Sought input where she felt she needed it and she was inclusive on some things, but on matters where she was convinced she was right and she was sure of herself, she just did it. And in a way that was refreshing. Because of trying to develop consensus on things where she really felt confident, uh, you know, I trusted her opinion.

Another staff member thought “she probably had an inner circle that she relied heavily on to bounce ideas off, but she kept my things close to the chest.” However, the lack of inclusion in the decision making process really bothered other employees. It was clear to most that “if she didn’t want you involved on a project, she wasn’t going to give you any information about it” nor was she going to solicit feedback when she developed department budgets, in particular. Of this process, an administrator said, “I think we are conveniently being kept in the dark on some things.”

Views of the incumbent’s leadership style seemed directly linked to individual perceptions of her as leader. There were conflicting statements regarding Jensen’s competence and the quality of the working relationship between her and the student affairs staff. Staff from student life, recreation, career services, and a couple of other small departments spoke highly of her and her capabilities. Dr. Jensen had experience in those functional areas, either as a professional or having supervised them at previous institutions. A director from one of these functional areas said that she “very much liked Dr. Jensen because her background was the same so we had a very natural connection there. I really appreciated how supportive she was of me.” Because many of the decisions that were made during her tenure benefitted these areas, many of the staff trusted her, felt supported, and learned from the experience. Overall, these staff members likely agree that “she was a great administrator who definitely had the well-being of student affairs as an entity on campus as a top priority.” Another said, “I had not been challenged by previous bosses as much as I was by her. I enjoyed it because I grew.” This led to

better personal relationships with staff, who expressed disappointment when she left.

In the functional areas which she did not have direct experience, many of the staff thought that her overall competence was compromised because she did not have a comprehensive understanding of their purpose. As one employee described it, “without having a background in my area, you would think she would really try to learn a lot about that area so she would be familiar with it. She was not interested in doing that.” Because she did not invest in nor learn about these functional areas, staff did not trust her or think her leadership was effective. Whether one perceived him/herself to benefit from or suffered under Jensen’s leadership, the expectations were the same for all of the direct reports. One director, who seemed particularly candid and honest summed this up by stating,

She didn’t like weak directors. And by that I mean, you’ve got to know your job, know it well, and don’t ask her questions. Don’t ask of her help. And she did tell us this. She told us at a staff meeting right up front, this is what I expect from my directors and if you can’t do the job...And I’ll give you an example. Budgets... if you can’t figure your budget out, then you don’t need to be a director. She laid it all out up front when she first got here. And that’s what she expected. And so I of course, know my budget. I know my job. I really didn’t have a problem with that. But there were some that did suffer. And there were a few that did, they were let go for those reasons. And so you quickly learn that if I have a problem in my department, I better handle it myself.

Although staff reaction to Jensen’s leadership style was mixed, most agreed that she acted like an executive. She was competent, efficient, and set high expectations for performance. While appreciated for keeping the staff informed about institutional and divisional issues, she was criticized for excluding others from the decision making process. Most would agree that her approach with staff varied depending upon her trust in the employee’s abilities and affinity for their particular department.

Relations with the Incumbent

Of the staff, few indicated that they had a close personal relationship with Jensen, save one director and one assistant director from different departments. The director with whom she was close had worked with her at a previous institution. The assistant director, a new professional, considered Jensen a mentor. Both considered Jensen's departure a "personal loss" as individuals and for the institution. The staff more frequently responded that they did not share a personal relationship with Jensen. She never officially communicated to any of the staff that she was not interested in getting to know them personally, but as one coordinator put it, "Not to say she wouldn't have listened, but I didn't get that warm, fuzzy feeling from her." One director explained that the length of her tenure could explain why he and others did not know her well. Even though the relationship never developed for two other female staff members, they felt encouraged by Jensen and appreciated for their work. One director said that after Jensen left,

She sent me a very nice email thanking me for my work. And she said that she was extremely pleased to have worked with me and I kept it. It's a very nice email. She wished me the luck with my higher ed pursuit and said I would be a wonderful because I had the heart and the efficiency. That made me feel really good. I know that was not the case for my peers. That that's not something that she did with everyone in the division.

That email supports the notion that the extent of the relationship most staff members had with Jensen was purely professional. Staff perceptions of that relationship indicate that interactions with Jensen were more formal. One director said that she always needed an appointment to speak with Jensen and

You don't go to her unless you absolutely need help. And by that I mean, title. The VP title is going to get you further on campus if you have a problem with some other department on campus, then you have to use her name. She'll have to make that phone call for you. I'm the VP and I want this done. And that's basically when you go to her.

Others felt very supported in their daily decision making process even though the

relationship was not particularly close. One director stated that he used to talk regularly with Jensen about the problems he was encountering and felt comfortable doing so. On the other hand, one director who thought, “a lot of people were scared” to present her with challenges because “you can never tell when she is going to go off on you.” Another employee in the recreation department thought the support his department received was due to the relationship that Jensen had with members of his staff. He wondered if others in the division noticed the favoritism. Of her he said, “I liked Dr. Jensen, she was a very good Vice President, to my department, to me, she was good. She was very supportive to our department and our program, though probably too overtly, as occasionally thought on campus.” Another director suggested that the relationship developed out of personal interest or experience with her particular department. Her experience was positive because, “Dr. Jensen had the same background as me so I think she was just more confident in making decisions with me. Maybe that’s not true of everyone else.” In general, the relationship that the majority of the staff had with Jensen was formal and purely professional. Staff who were satisfied with their relationship with Jensen felt supported and comfortable, while those who were unsatisfied with their relationship with Jensen felt excluded and uneasy in her presence.

Reaction to the Departure

Dr. Jensen’s departure from Southeastern State was swift. Within two weeks of announcing her resignation at a director’s meeting, she had moved to a new city for a new job. As stated earlier, the majority of the staff understood that she left because “it wasn’t a good fit between her and the new president” and did not fault her for looking out for her own best interest “and for being able to leave on her own terms.” A couple of staff members sensed she might be searching for a new job. Upon reflection, a high-level administrator laughed and said, “I can see

all the signs now. I can see trips that weren't well defined that I didn't even question that obviously were interviews. Now I've come to understand that this former VP had lots of options."

In reaction to her resignation some staff expressed disappointment while others were relieved. None of the reactions were particularly emotional or affective. To the extremes, one director described her departure as a personal "loss" while another said he "went out and bought a bottle of champagne." The majority of the staff were just surprised. Because she left so quickly after her announcement, surprise quickly turned to anxiety and concern over who would replace her and how they might be affected by the change. One director wondered, "What happens if, instead of us getting our own Vice President and maintaining our status as a division among divisions, what if we're consolidated into another area?" Another remembered also thinking about the future because "you never know who you are going to get and is it going to be better or is it going to be worse?" A few other staff members recalled feeling the urge to protect themselves personally and their department. The division, already short two directors, would now be moving forward without a vice president. A housing staff member remembered feeling stressed and questioned, "How are we going to pull everything off?" As a whole the staff were not overtly shocked by her decision to leave. While the timing may have caught many by surprise, the departure caused little affective response. The anxiety expressed about the leadership turnover was more about the disruption to the work environment and less about the loss of Jensen as a leader.

The Interim Appointment

Just hours after Dr. Jensen told the president she was leaving Southeastern, Dr. Taylor called the assistant vice president, Mr. Drew Lawson, to ask if he would serve as interim. He

accepted, and the following day, a campus wide email was sent announcing both the resignation and appointment. “I think the staff generally have responded favorably and positively,” the interim said of his appointment. Lawson, who “is basically the poster child of Southeastern State University,” received his undergraduate degree from the institution and joined the student affairs staff there in the early 1990’s. In her announcement to the campus on the day following Dr. Jensen’s, the president indicated that Lawson would serve until a search was complete. His length of service and his skill set were likely what qualified him for the appointment. When asked about his reaction to the appointment, one director said, “I couldn’t see why it would be anyone else.” Another coordinator agreed stating, “I feel like he is qualified to be the interim certainly. I feel like he was the best choice.” Lawson thought the president chose him for the position because he was “motivated to serve... and because she knew there wasn’t anyone else who knew the scope and scale and some of the nuances within the division.” In addition, some said he had strong relationships with other divisions on campus and “could be a team player because he is very open to partnering and collaborating.” Because the interim had both institutional history and cultural knowledge, one assistant director was grateful for the appointment and insisted that had a student affairs outsider been named, it would have been problematic because they “would know very little about what we do.”

Even though most positively received Lawson as the interim, there were foreshadowings of problems to come. Of the decision to ask Lawson to serve, several staff members recalled feeling concerned because of his workload. He had just been asked to co-chair the university strategic planning committee. Lawson was relieved of neither this responsibility nor any of his previous duties when he assumed the position. When asked about the circumstances surrounding the appointment, a housing staff member said,

Honestly, I was concerned at first when he was named interim because at the time he was Assistant Vice President and oversaw housing because we didn't have a housing director. And because he was also chairing the strategic planning committee. I know he was stretched thin. I just really feared what type of attention and support the division would get or that we would fall through the cracks.

Being able to balance the workload worried a different staff member because "somebody should have realized that he has a lot of stuff to do now. And now we are giving him more? We need to give him support during this time to help him accomplish all that... I don't know to what extent that was done."

Even though many recognized that he did not have the qualifications to be the permanent vice president, they thought his professional background was relevant, having served in the interim capacity once before, and his familiarity with the staff and the campus was more important than a terminal degree. An associate director tells me,

Well, what I know about Drew is he's been here for quite a while. He's been in Student Affairs for quite a while. He does not have a doctoral degree. I know specifically he has said he is not a candidate for the full time Vice President position and doesn't want to be. Drew is very well respected on campus by faculty and staff and students alike. So I think he was the natural person to put in that position.

This past interim experience was not only relevant but also served as a development opportunity for Lawson. A couple of staff members who were at Southeastern the last time he was interim asserted that his skills had improved and he was likely to be better this time around. However, what really qualified Lawson for the job is that, "He's been here. He knows the institution. People respect him and he's been interim before." A director that had not worked in the division for very long, but worked at Southeastern for a number of years and knew Lawson's reputation on campus, said of his second term as interim, "I know where Drew's heart is most of all, and I know that even though he may not have the degree, he has the skills to run this division. He can step into the position and completely run with it."

Although he may be the most qualified on campus for the position, have an “excellent background,” and be well liked and respected on campus, staff had a mixed reaction to whether he would be able to do the job. Several staff mentioned concerns over his aptitude for financial management. A staff member who relies heavily on student fees for her budget said,

Drew knew certain components of things that went on in the division, but I don’t think he knew everything. And the things that he doesn’t know is what really challenges him, specifically budgeting and budgetary process. Drew’s not ever really been involved in that.

His lack of exposure to the financial aspects of the division may well be attributed to the leadership preferences of Dr. Jensen. Another director, whose department is also funded through student fees, commented on Lawson’s lack of familiarity with division finances. He said, “When it comes to finances and what’s happening with those fees, he knows very little about it. Our previous vice president kept a close watch on that... for example, that there are surplus funds out there.”

As mentioned previously, Lawson’s workload concerned several staff members and influenced their attitudes about his capabilities. When asked about his competence, a housing staff member replied,

Really no matter how competent one is, when you are put in such a position where the division itself is so understaffed and you’re trying to fill in the gaps within your staffing plus your primary area of responsibility, in addition to the responsibilities you inherited as becoming the interim, I’m sure it is quite taxing for him.

To summarize, competence and ability to do the job did not mean the same to the staff. Most believed that Lawson possessed most of the skill sets (competence), except financial management, to fulfill the obligations of the position but lacked the ability to carry them out.

The Interim's Leadership Style

Lawson's leadership style differed greatly from Jensen's. Whereas many described her as "dictatorial" and "detail oriented," they considered Lawson more inclusive and focused on "process." Jensen rarely brought the entire division together, if at all, during her tenure. Lawson, because he solicits feedback from others and because he was tasked with the strategic plan, changed that. One staff member stressed that bringing the division together for these purposes helped with "morale and to show he was paying attention." The most obvious example of his affinity toward future planning was revealed and discussed in every interview. One director said, "Drew loves to future plan. He love white boards and he loves to future plan." During my observation of a director's meeting, Drew was writing on the white board when the staff arrived. He was thoughtfully "mapping out processes" regarding the plan and other future division objectives.

Because Lawson focuses more on the future, it often interferes with the way he manages. Many staff expressed frustration because he did not delegate well and was often unresponsive. Of these characteristics, combined with his need for consensus, one director said,

I think the leadership style, in my opinion, is a little weak. Basically to me, that's sort of a management position, and you have to manage people. He's a little bit too easy going with the staff and there comes a time where you have to say I'm the boss and this is the way it's going to be. Why? Because I said so. I am the manager, I am the VP. I just think he's a little too lenient. He's not as tough. And not that you have to be tough, there's a fine line there. But I think from his perspective, he tries to make everybody happy. He doesn't want to be the bad guy.

Some of the directors just wanted their basic needs met. The strategic plan added a layer of work to all staff in the division. Still, many tried to accomplish daily work and needed direction from the interim but "he doesn't return phone calls, he doesn't return emails, he doesn't do his job." This experience seemed almost universal among the directors. After a director's meeting, many

directors asked Lawson for “5 minutes” in order to have questions answered and documents signed. The staff waited patiently for their turn with him because it was “difficult to get meetings and information from him.” Lawson seemed to be aware of how the directors felt conceding,

I know there’s a level of frustration. I’m probably not as affable as I used to be because I realize managing my time is a daily struggle to get it all in and meet the needs of the president and other administrative and academic unit heads.

The staff perceive Lawson to be well liked, respected, and trusted on campus, but recognized that he was spread too thin. However, they attribute his inability to manage all his responsibilities to the president. As the interim,

He’s been doing way more than one person should be asked to do. It’s one thing to be an interim, and now you’re a Vice President and Assistant Vice President and you have 4 or 5 departments that report to you and you’re made chair of the strategic planning committee and then you’re dumped with five more departments on top of you?? No, not well done. Not well thought out from the perspective of the leadership.

A few staff members empathize with Lawson’s predicament and his struggles. Two even compared it to “treading water.” Another said,

You know, I like Mr. Lawson very much as a person. I really do. But I think it’s too much. I don’t doubt that he could be the interim VP if someone else was doing his old job too. That’s just 2 really big jobs. I mean he could spend his whole day in meetings and not literally do anything else.

One staff member recognized that Lawson often worked long hours and on weekends in an attempt to keep up with the work. He says, “I’ve seen him here at 7:30 in the morning as well as 10:00 at night. I know he has a lot on his plate and a lot of challenges to contend with, but I think he is doing what he can.”

Even though the staff recognized that Lawson was overwhelmed, it did not lessen their frustration. “Because he is on all these committees, with the president, he forgets he has a whole division of student affairs to run. It’s got to be dealt with. In other words, we need him to do his real job.” Frustration resonates through all levels in the division. For example, Lawson scheduled

an all-division meeting and at the last minute was called to the president's office and could not attend. The meeting went on as scheduled but many of the directors, who did not know of his absence in advance, were aggravated. A long time director sought me out and said, "So here's the real story, we are having a staff meeting and look who's not here!" Still others shrug his absence and his inaccessibility off realizing that "when you are in a situation when you are trying to do everything, some need is not going to be met." Another director clearly just felt sorry for him because, "He's struggling. He's struggling because he is having to balance so much and wear so many hats." So even though their work is affected, the majority of the division realized that it is unintentional and a consequence of the circumstances.

Perhaps because Lawson was so well liked and respected, the staff were willing to overlook his shortcomings. In comparison to how one staff member thought of Jensen, he said, "Drew's not a perfect person, but he's a caring person. His heart is in the right place." Lawson's longevity and likeability contributed to the staff's willingness to support his appointment. Said one associate director, "I think that the level of respect that already existed has helped the interim person be much more successful. People were willing to get on his bandwagon because they respected him and they felt like he had their best interests at heart." Because of this, there was a true affection that many people had for him. During a directors meeting, several employees made eye contact with me and affectionately mocked his mannerisms and laughed about how animated he was during the facilitation.

As per the staff, Lawson was not only respected in the division but across campus. A new director suggested that administrators outside the division admired him and this positively impacted student affairs. Because Lawson is "so well respected... and not just by the people that have worked for him, but people that are his peers and people above him." For this reason,

another manager thinks “that the president is going to listen to what he has to say” and student affairs stands to benefit. Being held in high regard lessens the impact of the reason for the interim appointment because for one staff member, “It’s very heartening to have someone like Drew Lawson here because he is such an advocate for the institution. I mean he loves this institution. And it shows.” In summary, the leadership style of the interim contrasted greatly from the incumbent. Lawson was complimented for being inclusive and sensitive but criticized for lack of efficiency. As a core employee with longevity at the institution, he was well respected within the division and throughout the campus.

The Events of the Interregnum

Inherited Circumstances

The staff were forthcoming with their concerns for the institution, the division, and their own departments. Both the environment and the leadership approach of the former and interim leader created conditions and priorities that had an affect on the student affairs staff. The two most important issues at the institutional level noted by the staff were the apparent presidential initiatives and the campus relations between student affairs and other units. The president had introduced several initiatives, one of which was the already mentioned strategic plan. The president also initiated a rebranding campaign that was met with mixed reaction, but seemed relatively low on student affairs staff member concerns. However, the most challenging circumstance created by the president is the “instability of so many high level administrative openings” on campus.

Although not specifically mentioned when asked about their perception of the former vice president, staff seemed concerned with the working relationships she had with other administrators on campus. A statement by an assistant director summed up one primary issue

that arose frequently by observing,

I don't really think that our division had necessarily the best relationship with some of the sister divisions because of the leadership. I would say the biggest challenge he [Lawson] had was trying to build bridges with the individuals internal and external to the division because of what he inherited.

Having Lawson in the position was helpful in advancing the division and mending those relationships that were fragmented during the previous administration. Several administrators agreed with one assistant director who stated,

Drew has had better luck getting some of the things that we need than perhaps Jensen did. But I think a lot of that had to do, not with the fact that she was not a good leader, I think a lot of it had to do with the relationship that she and one of her peers had. It was a very abrasive and/or tumultuous relationship. Whereas, Drew has been able to have a somewhat positive working relationship with other admins, especially the business VP.

The relationship Lawson had with the interim vice president for academic affairs was also an asset. The two had worked closely together for years on the new student orientation program and in other capacities. One director said "If that interim VPAA position had been filled by just about anybody else, it would be tougher. But because she's there, that helps us." Because this environment had been missing during Jensen's tenure, having good working relationships with other key administrators was reassuring and comforting to the student affairs staff. A female department leader said that Lawson's interim appointment allowed him [Lawson] to have a direct connection to the president during such a strategic time. Because Lawson was well connected, she felt "really good about that."

In the division, the primary issues for the staff resulted from Jensen's leadership style. Because she rarely brought the entire division together and kept many decisions for herself, morale had decreased. This lack of communication and inclusion affected the spirit and work satisfaction for some employees. "People wanted to be team players because we are such a small

division” but were not provided the opportunity. Confident that Lawson recognized that morale was an issue, one director said, “I think he’s been around long enough and saw the damage that she’d done that he knows there is healing to be done.” Staff departures during Jensen’s leadership also contributed to lower morale. “Because people were jumping ship” prior to Lawson’s appointment, one director said she needed “caring leadership to bring morale back up.”

Other issues in staffing continued after the interim’s appointment. The majority of the staff in the division recognized that the housing department was struggling because they were so short staffed and without a director. In addition, the director of disability services left under Jensen and had not been replaced, the counseling office had one position downgraded to ten months, and career services was operating with only one professional staff member. Of these vacancies, a director said, “I think during this period that staffing has been huge, an absolutely huge issue. Before this man was interim, there were so many problems. There were a lot of people who weren’t happy with the VP. So, they were jumping ship.” These departments are hopeful that Lawson could help. One director summarized,

It’s critical that certain hiring takes place. You know housing has been just decimated. They have a lot of vacancies. To me they just can’t keep rocking along as they are. So I would hate to see them have to wait. And Drew’s talking about hiring a new position for a counselor, which I thought was promising. He says that’s going to happen. He says he hopes that’s going to happen.

At four months into the interim period, the only vacancy that had been filled was the director of housing. The other positions had either not been posted or not been approved to be filled.

Interregnum Operations

In the division, communication from the interim emerged as a problem. As mentioned earlier, staff were discouraged by the lack of Lawson’s responsiveness. Staff were neither getting

answers to their questions nor being provided pertinent information that impacted their jobs. For example, one employee in recreation had been told that intramural fields were going to be repurposed for athletics. This created anxiety over the accuracy of the statement but also caused concern for what else could be unknown to the division as a whole. When compared to Jensen's leadership period, one employee felt "more informed about what's going on with the university, what things were coming up and what we needed to focus on" than with Lawson.

Unfortunately for the staff, director and division meetings were not facilitated any better. Joint meetings were scheduled but agendas were not provided in advance. The director's meeting was no exception. Because agendas were not provided in advance, one director felt as though "she can never prepare for anything." Ironically, the strategic plan emphasizes communication. This contradiction was not lost on one staff member; she highlighted, "How can we be expected to improve our communication techniques with people on campus when we don't even see that from our supervisor."

The emphasis on the strategic plan along with other new initiatives caused some staff members to feel burned out. For a long time director, "It's a really tough situation right now because it's hard to really focus on providing really good services when you are just trying to keep your nose above the water." Another wonders how "they can get excited about it [the strategic plan] because the staff have been in the trenches for so long."

Being short staffed, burned out, and freer to express themselves allowed conflict to arise between departments during the interim period. Although the problem of space utilization among a number of departments existed before Jensen left, the issue came to a head after she left. Even Lawson "kept hearing some grumblings about concerns about space utilization and that people weren't playing nice." Testing and disability services needed space for testing, staff were not

being able to access the fax and copier or the break room, and for some, the Student Activities area was too loud. As a result, several staff members went to Lawson for help. On director told him,

This is not working. I'm not used to working in this way and I don't think that I can provide effective and efficient student services to my students when they come in and I want to take a photocopy of their records and I have to go into the testing room to get permission and there's no one there because that office doesn't have a graduate assistant at that time and then we don't have a copier that we can use down the hall in what should be our reception office or our division office.

This issue was more critical for some than others. One director said, "it's petty stuff, but some of that petty stuff means a lot to people." At the same time, "It's not an earth shattering issue but it's one of the things that he [Lawson] is having to deal with." In response, Lawson tagged two staff members to lead a committee "because there was so much fighting going on" to attempt to resolve their issues. Some appreciated the opportunity to work it out together while others just hoped that Lawson would intervene. At the time of the interviews, a proposal was being finalized for submission.

At the department level, the primary issues directly related to the interim's leadership style. At the time of the initial interviews, several directors complained that Lawson was inaccessible. If and when meetings occurred, they focused on the strategic plan, not individual or departmental concerns. In comparison to the previous VP, one director said, "I used to meet with her weekly. Right now I'm only scheduled to meet with the interim monthly. So I accumulate a list of things over that month, and of course a lot of them wind up taking care of themselves during that time." Often times, monthly director meetings were cancelled or dominated by the strategic plan. One staff member expressed her frustration because "I wait all month and have my list of questions and all we wind up doing is talking about my strategic plans."

The lack of responsiveness was tied to the amount of work the interim had on his plate. In addition, the staff recognized that the needs and desires of the president trump theirs. When Lawson missed the all-division meeting because he had been called to meet with Dr. Taylor, a staff member commented, “That is how this president is... everything is an emergency. Drew could have been getting married today and he would’ve had to cancel to meet with her.” But to get “like two responses ever from Mr. Lawson” because “he is just impossible to catch” was catching up with at least one director. She explained this behavior by stating, “ I think it is that he kept his old job and took on the interim.” The longer the interim period goes on the greater the impact throughout the division. Just two weeks after their initial interview, one associate director commented,

Remember how I told you before that having an interim didn’t really affect me because I wasn’t a director -- well, it is now. I have had 4 meetings with Drew that have been canceled in the last 2 weeks. It’s becoming difficult to do the things I need to do because I need some answers.”

In sum, the interim inherited an unstable situation. The staff felt both disconnected from their leadership and each other. His attempts to reestablish the staff’s connection to the leadership were unsuccessful because Lawson’s focus on the strategic plan, rather than division and departmental issues, rendered him ineffective and remote. However, Lawson’s attempts to reconcile staff morale were appreciated and successful.

Individual Effectiveness and Organizational Performance

Because the staff perceived that the interim was not accessible and that his focus was primarily on the strategic plan, many felt like their individual needs were not being met. This influenced their ability to be effective and efficient. The majority of the student affairs staff indicated that Lawson was terrible about answering emails or returning phone calls. This was not a new habit, but because he was now their leader and not their peer, it presented more

consequences. Efficiency was affected by the response time of the interim. One employee who was short staffed in her department complained,

It's just the amount of time it takes to get things addressed... that's an issue for me. I will email him asking just short questions, because I always try to keep my communications with him short because I know he is busy and I don't hear back. You know I don't want to nag him but it's usually a really important question. So that's been an issue for me is -- the lack of response with just emails.

When asked how the response time affected one employee's ability to do his work he said, "It depends on the urgency of it. Sometimes it does impact my effectiveness, especially when I need to make a purchase or have the approval to make a policy change." In comparison to the response time from the former vice president, which usually only took "a day or two," the interim was inconsistent. One recreation staff member recalled,

With the interim tag and all the things that Mr. Lawson did on a normal day, which he still did, and the new things that were added, it's hard to find him. It was hard to find Drew when he was just the Associate Vice President or the Assistant, much less as the interim. As far as us operating on a normal day, it created a couple of challenges.

One challenge that another director provided as an example occurred when he was trying to get approval to hire a new staff member. Because he was new, he complained that his supervisor was unavailable to help him navigate university procedure. He needed to know "How do I hire a new person? Who am I supposed to ask?" When he was finally able to get the paperwork together, he submitted them to Lawson. At that point he said,

I turned in my paperwork to hire the Assistant Director to him and after a month and a half, found out that HR didn't have it. So, either he turned it in and Business and Finance lost it, or he never turned it in. So you know, that's a month and half delay, a month and a half to track it down and it probably never got turned in.

Even though some work processes interrupted efficiency and effectiveness, most felt as though they were able to accomplish their work. For one employee, "the actual product we put out to students didn't change."

Because some staff were not getting the responses as quickly as needed, a couple felt confident enough to take action without involving the interim. Several directors indicated that many issues either were neglected or resolved during the lag time between responses. Another employee said she “heard one of her co-workers just got tired of asking him so she just handled it on her own.”

Even though most of the concerns expressed were based on individual departmental needs, a few staff members cited that overall organizational performance was also affected during this interim period. Of the ability to maintain daily operations, one of the recreation staff members said,

I think the progress that we have sustained in the division has been pushed more by the individual departments than necessarily from the division hierarchy. Drew is supportive; don't get me wrong with that, but Drew is also fairly well focused. Before the interim appointment was made, he had been on the strategic planning, one of the co-chairs for the president's committee. He's still doing that which takes a lot of his time. So I think the progress has been kind of pushed by the individual departments and the individual directors.

In dealing with the space utilization problem, Lawson delegated the task to two employees. Of the proposal that resulted from the collaboration, one of the committee chairs thought, “it was very productive. It was cordial and we accomplished a lot. Lawson wasn't present for that, we worked it out on our own.” For one associate director, the interim appointment should not have that large of an impact on organization's ability to perform. Her expectation was, “We are all competent and we can all do our jobs without having someone at the helm permanently. It shouldn't impede our ability to serve students and retain students and keep things happening for students on campus.”

Staff Relations with the Interim

Staff seemed to have a closer and more casual personal relationship with the interim than with his predecessor. Most staff thought that Lawson was “easy to get along with” and genuinely cared about their well-being. When staff met and talked with Lawson, he was encouraging and open. In comparison to Jensen, one staff member recognized Lawson for being compassionate and sincere. The staff’s comfort level with Lawson even allowed one director to feel comfortable enough to “call Drew at home or on his cell if I really need to get to him.” With Lawson at the helm, one director thought the staff “is far more relaxed and not on-guard.” Even though Lawson was well-liked, one director expressed concern over the close relationships that he may have with some. She wondered if he now struggles to supervise staff members who are peers and friends under normal circumstances. Because he “struggles with that,” he does not have the ability to hold underperforming directors accountable. Likewise, she thinks that the staff may also struggle with the new arrangement. She said, “Drew was our peer. And now he’s our boss. And you know that relationship is completely different now. And you know, a lot of people are having a hard time dealing with that.”

Professionally, the relationship with Lawson was more casual than it was with Jensen. Even though Lawson’s position required him to now be a supervisor, where he was once a peer, a student life administrator said,

I’m trying to give him the same respect I give a Vice President, in terms of not going over his head to another Vice President or to the Chief of Staff of the President to get to the President. Because I think it’s important that he assume that role, that he be that person, intermediary between the Director level and the Vice Presidential level.

Due to his interim appointment, one coordinator thought she now had freedom to be “candid and frank with Mr. Lawson” because he listened. An overall comparison between Jensen and Lawson, as recalled by an associate director, suggested that “I think he is invested a little bit

more in relationships and letting people know that he's listening." No staff member indicated that they were unsatisfied with their professional relationship with the interim.

Relations Between staff

On a personal level, most of the staff felt as though they got along with others in the division. The staff suggested that during Jensen's tenure as vice president, they drifted apart but became closer during the interim period. One director stated that during Jensen's tenure, "We were really focused on our jobs, and not the camaraderie of being colleagues." After she left, some of that behavior changed. One director thinks, "Actually, I think we have gotten closer... I really do. I know for example that my department and a certain other department has gotten closer. I think all of us have for the most part... seems like I noticed the feeling of needing to hang together." Two observations support this notion. After the director's meeting, all of the attendees stayed afterwards and chatted for twenty minutes or so about their families, work, and hobbies. At the all-division meeting where breakfast was served, the staff seemed very cordial and sociable with each other. Some even showed affection when greeting one another.

Lawson supported the development of these relationships. He provided opportunities for staff to get together in both a social and working environment. For example, a staff member told me that after Jensen left Lawson discovered that he had an allowance from the food service contractor on campus to use any way he chose. During my observation of the all-division breakfast meeting, one director said "He is using it to cater some of our meetings. Joan never did that. He's trying to bring us together... food always helps that!"

Professionally, not much changed during the interim period. However, there were situations that arose during the interim that have exacerbated tense relationships and accentuated positive ones. One director said,

You know I think the dynamic is very similar...there are certain people in certain departments in the division that are...if you call all hands, they're gonna be there. And then there's others that are there if you call on them really hard. So I don't know that it's changed necessarily. I know there's probably been more support for housing simply because of their current staffing issues. That would have probably been whether there was an interim Vice President or not. So, I think it's kind of a mixed bag.

In addition to the housing example described above, Career Services also benefitted from the support that others provided. During their recent career fair, the director became concerned because her event was going to be larger than her small staff could handle. When she solicited other departments for help, she found,

One director wrote me back and said, well we usually have a staff meeting at that time but instead of the staff meeting I'll just bring the staff over and we'll be there to help you all day. So literally, every single one of her paid full-time staff members and her GA's and student workers were here. The whole day. I couldn't believe it. So generally I think people are like that here and willing to do that if they can. You know I've partnered with programs and stuff like that too, and you know everybody's really open to that kind of stuff.

Another situation that had not been as cordial revolved around the problem with space utilization in one of the buildings with many student affairs departments. Professional relations were strained over the disagreement over space in their building. As they negotiated a proposal for change, "people try to work with other staff but it is met with some resistance."

Because the relationships had not really changed during the interim period, the dynamics had not really changed either. One mid-level administrator, who was not completely satisfied with the current dynamics observed,

I think there are dynamics that existed long before the old VP went away and I think some of those still exist. Those are probably going to exist when the new person comes and that's going to be one of the interesting challenges for the new person -- there's some entrenched dynamics here that, you know, someone's going to have to try to break up a little bit.

In general, staff perceived the dynamics between colleagues in the same way that they perceived relationships -- situational. When they chose to engage, the result was positive but when the

situation was tense or threatened their own department, the dynamics were strained.

Some of the tension created division among staff. As mentioned earlier, many staff felt as though Jensen favored certain departments over others. In general, these same departments were the ones arguing over space utilization. This division became obvious during the observation of an all university convocation meeting and the all-division meeting. In both of these meetings, Recreation and Student Activities sat together and Disability Services, Testing, and Elderhostel sat together. Other directors chose to separate from the larger group. At the convocation, Lawson sat with the other executives rather than members of the student affairs division.

The Interim's Charge

Understanding the goal of the interim leadership period help guide both the leader and followers. Not only does the charge given to the leader provide direction for accomplishing tasks and implementing changes, but it also helps manage staff expectations. In this interim situation, the charge was never specifically communicated to the staff. When asked what Lawson's charge was, one director exclaimed, "We as a division have not been told what his charge was. I, as an individual director, have not been told that he has any other special instructions as far as what the expectations are for his interim period." There seemed to be confusion among the staff in understanding if Lawson had the full power and authority of a permanent vice president or if he was just a placeholder. As one staff member understands, the interim's ability to make changes and decisions "depends on how much power the president gives the interim, in terms of whether they can actually do anything or if they are just a placeholder." The president, Dr. Taylor, called Lawson herself to ask him to serve in the interim capacity. As he recalled, "She called and said Drew, I need you to do this, I need you to take the position." He interpreted their conversation to mean that he was not just a placeholder. Because one director had been asking for additional

staff, he called human resources to find out for himself the extent of Lawson's authority. He states, "When I called the director of Human Resources and asked if Lawson had the power to do this, she said no. She could easily be wrong. We'll find out."

Regardless of the amount of authority that the interim had, the staff never had direct communication, other than the email, from the president. In the email announcement, Taylor says, "During the coming weeks, we will begin a search for a new Vice President for Student Affairs. Until that search is completed, Mr. Drew Lawson, Assistant Vice President for Student Affairs, has agreed to serve as Interim Vice President." She provided no information about what he had been asked to accomplish. Several staff members mentioned a meeting in which the president's chief of staff was to attend to discuss his charge. The meeting occurred but the charge was never discussed, nor did any member of the staff inquire.

The Understood Charge

Even though no official charge was communicated to the staff, the interim leader moved forward. Before he was asked to be the interim, Lawson had been tasked with co-chairing the president's strategic plan committee. He was not relieved of those duties when he was appointed. According to every staff member, this task was top priority. Strategic planning not only helps the institution move forward, but the division as well. Lawson did not wait for a permanent leader to be hired to make critical decisions about how the division would enact this plan. A director commented,

I think, and you may have heard, he's really involved in the strategic planning process. So I know that that's one thing that he's majorly focused on. And that's sort of being rolled out this spring, so obviously before we get our next permanent person. So I think, in himself, I think he believes that it's his purpose to sort of start us on a new path and get that outlined and a sort of foundation laid for the next person.

Intentional or not, this was how the interim managed during this period. When the staff talked

with me about the strategic plan, they suggested that it consumed Lawson's focus and therefore became a higher priority for all the directors. One direct report said,

The charge for interim period has been the strategic plan, completely the strategic plan. I was looking back at my emails and I see that he joined that committee in March. It's really unfortunate because I feel like he was a great choice to be on the committee and great with the committee. And then Dr. Jensen left and now so much of our focus has been on the strategic plan.

In a directors meeting that immediately followed the announcement of the strategic plan, the agenda was about moving the division forward. At this point, the directors had already been articulating and submitting strategies and methods for meeting the strategic plan, even before the plan was made known to the general campus. While processing the final version of the plan that was revealed earlier that day, Lawson told the directors that they were "light years ahead of every other division on campus because we are the only ones really working on it." During the meeting, the staff showed no enthusiasm for the strategic plan; they looked around room, doodled on their papers, and responded very little to the questions that Lawson asked. After the meeting one staff member commented, "I'm so tired of talking about the strategic plan. I'm worn out."

A second purpose of the same director's meeting was to solicit feedback from department leaders about which student development theory they wanted to adopt into practice. Lawson hope that this initiative would help prepare the staff for a new vice president. When asked, two individuals agreed to champion this effort and would later facilitate the all-division meeting in which all the staff would attempt to implement the chosen theory into their work. Lawson was unable to attend this meeting because he was called to meet with the president, so the meeting ended without directives from the interim.

Although having Lawson at the table with the president when decisions were being made about the future of the institution may have “benefitted the division because we are a part of the process,” some staff worried that all their efforts may be reversed when the permanent vice president was hired. An assistant director verbalized his concerns when he said,

I find it interesting that in these staff meetings we’ve had recently that we have an interim that is wanting to chart the course of Student Affairs and it sort of seems backwards because he’s not a candidate for the position, that he’s not going to be the one leading you forward. His explanation is that will help attract a candidate. But I’m not sure that you will attract a candidate who knows that someone else is charting the course for them.

Because the staff was asked to participate in two projects that resulted in long term planning and decisions that would affect the future, one director suggested that these initiatives were motivated by the interim’s own idea of his charge. She stated that, “I think he believes that it is his purpose to sort of start us on a new path and get that outlined as a sort-of foundation for the next person.”

Being prepared for the new vice president was a welcomed goal, even though it took away from an individual’s primary work. The staff seemed to appreciate that Lawson was trying to get them “ready and poised” and have them “polished” for the new person. By “mapping out departmental processes, fixing processes, and having better documentation of what we do” could only enhance the work of individuals, departments, and the division, said one employee. Lawson said he intentionally planned these exercises so “we could really identify who we are as a division.” This manifested itself in individual and assignments and in director and division meetings. Of those meetings, one staff member commented,

This has been good. He’s hosted several division-wide meetings which is something that hadn’t been done previously and more or less he used this as a medium to lay out his expectations for the division and talk about his vision of what we need to work towards creating a solid division as we move through the Vice President of Student Affairs selection process because we want to attract quality candidates to the institution.

We ultimately want to put our best foot forward when searching.

Trying to establish a division identity had been a supplemental goal of the interim vice president. Through the strategic plan and the theory to practice efforts, the division kept moving forward. This presented challenges for a number of directors. Later in this chapter, the findings will reveal how this has influenced their productivity and effectiveness.

The second primary responsibility of the interim was to maintain the current operations of the division. Even though this part of the charge was not communicated directly, the majority of the staff recognized this implied task. When coupled with the long term planning, one associate director summed up what several others also thought Lawson was trying to accomplish,

I think his charge is to keep us moving forward and to make sure we don't fall apart. Not that falling apart should really be an option...we are all competent. Not having someone at the helm permanently shouldn't impede our ability to serve students. So I think his charge is to make sure the essential things happen by keeping people on board and engaged. Some people don't do well without a leader. They don't like ambiguity. Some end up going rogue. I think he is trying to keep it all together and to keep it moving forward. I don't think his charge would be to make sweeping changes or to restructure the whole division right before we hire a new VPSA. I think it just to kind of keep us all moving forward in a positive direction.

Although not privy to details of the call from the president, one director assumed that Taylor expected him to manage the staff directly and cover the normal responsibilities of the vice president. For one director, the charge was simple, "Steer the ship and make sure we don't hit any icebergs!"

Concerns inherited by Lawson dealt with two primary issues for the staff: low morale and concern for student affairs status among other campus divisions. In response to the low morale reported by the staff, Lawson created a number of occasions for staff to get together socially. According to a number of staff members, the division had not had the opportunity to come together as a group while under Jensen's administration. One expressed,

One of the things that shocked me when I came to Southeastern is that we were never brought together as a division... to just talk about some of the accomplishments of the year or of the semester or some of, where are we going...what's on the horizon... and everywhere I'd worked prior to that, at minimum, the division head or the department head on a regular basis kind of brought us together and said, pats on the back, this is what's in the future. And so, I think for morale and to show you're paying attention, that's important.

The interim introduced several all-division events in order for the staff to have the opportunity to get to know each other. In addition to the breakfast he provided at the all-division meeting, Lawson "had a couple of division luncheons. He also did a division wide Christmas gathering. He's done these kind of get togethers to make use feel more like a unit." "Trough Day" was another event that Lawson sanctioned. Trough Day was a monthly Friday tradition before Jensen became the vice president. During those days, the main student affairs office hosted a sort of potluck open house in which the staff brought food to share with the division. This was a time for all student affairs staff to socialize and mingle at work. The majority of the staff mentioned how pleased they were that this tradition was reinstated. One staff member believed that the reason Lawson brought this back was because "he pushed for the staff to get to know each other better. Trough Day was a great time to grab some soul food or some junk food, or just chat with each other."

Because many staff members felt excluded under Jensen's administration, Lawson decided to create situations that felt inclusive. As Lawson puts it, he "built that in with line people, clerical staff, and directors in an effort to kind of get everyone together again because that had not happened in a while." When Jensen led direct report meetings, a couple of individuals who managed departments but did not hold the title of director were not regularly invited. When Lawson was named interim, he included all staff who managed departments regardless of title. As a result, one coordinator recognized his efforts by stating that "We were

glad to get to go to those meetings. We were glad to be included.”

The staff not only appreciated being included, but they also appreciated that Lawson recognized their needs. Said one associate director, “It shows you are paying attention and that’s important... you can go days without seeing some of the people that you work with, and so it helped make us feel like we were all in the same boat, trying to go the same direction.” These strategies were congruent with Lawson’s leadership style. One director appreciates that “Mr. Lawson is very much a cheerleader and wants everyone to know each other and have relationships on a personal level.” This effort seemed to work because the majority of the staff indicated that morale was improving for the division since he was appointed interim. As one manager puts it, “That is definitely a huge difference between Dr. Jensen and Mr. Lawson.”

Some staff also expressed concerns for the status of student affairs on campus. Even though less than half of the departments were concerned, the issue was worth mentioning. One concerned director in the student life area thought that not having a permanent leader could negatively increase their status on campus. He said,

Cause really, we’re not as large as the academic division. That has to be the number one, in terms of size and mission, but we like to be treated as equal shareholders and partners with a place at the table and a stake in the operations. We feel like what we do is very important in terms of student life and student development. If we’re suddenly absorbed by the business office, they do a wonderful job in their own line in certain areas, but in many cases I’ve seen that they don’t share that concern for students in terms of customer service and terms of service delivery.

A staff member in Recreation was also concerned because,

I’m not privy to knowing how much of a seat at the table with the President and her council he gets. You would assume with a full time Vice President in a normal circumstance, they would have an equal share and equal voice at the table. I would hope that’s the case with Drew being the interim, but I’m not in the position to know whether that is or isn’t the case.

One strategy that the staff recognized as important to keeping student affairs an equal

partner at the institution was developing a response to the strategic plan ahead of the rest of campus. One director suggested that, “Because Mr. Lawson is the co-chair, he wanted us to be out in front of everything.” One director viewed being out in front of everything as “a huge advantage,” even though “not everyone may see it that way.” Protecting student affairs’ status was important because, as one director put it, “Hopefully, we will not give anything away during this period that we can’t get back.”

Being an equal partner was a concern for the staff but also for Lawson. During the spring convocation meeting, he sat with all the members of the executive team. He also stated that he thought his purpose, achieved through the strategic plan, was “to become a true member of the executive team, to build relationships with the vice presidents for academic affairs and business and finance so we can identify initiatives for the next few years that are sustainable, regardless of who is sitting in the VP seat.” The findings indicated that this was a strength of Lawson’s leadership. For his relationship with the vice president of business and finance, Lawson “has nurtured that better than the previous vice president.” In addition, the staff viewed that meeting the needs of the president as necessary to maintain or even advance the reputation of student affairs with her.

What is Missing from the Charge

Although the perceived charge included both moving the division forward and maintaining departmental needs, the staff indicated that Lawson needed improvement in both areas. Findings suggested that staff were overwhelmed with trying to move forward with the strategic plan effort and the initiative to put theory into practice, while also fulfilling their normal obligations. One staff member said that even in her individual meetings with Lawson, the focus was on the strategic plan. She stated,

And then Dr. Jensen left and now so much focus has been on the strategic plan. And I know it's going to affect Student Affairs greatly, but it's all strategic plan. Whenever we meet, it's all about the strategic plan and our process maps and how we're going to do that. And we have other on-going issues for all of our offices, and even when I meet with him one on one, it's been strategic plan.

Even though they recognized that moving forward advanced the division, staff seemed to be more concerned with maintaining their individual needs. They thought Lawson either did not have the time or the leadership skills to manage their needs. One director expressed sympathy stating, "Drew was really stretched thin in terms of trying to do everything. I think when you are in that situation and when you try to do it all, some need is not going to be met." The perceived lack of departmental support caused frustration throughout the staff, extending beyond the directors. An assistant director recalled,

His secretary told me once his two priorities were Strategic Management Plan and Enrollment Management Council. Well from a staff member standpoint that's sort of frustrating. I wonder where do we stand? When I was told that, it was almost like a slap in the face from your leader. If those are his two priorities the where do we stand? What support do we get?

A frustrated director said she spoke for a number of functional areas when she stated, "I think that a lot of these departments feel like they're not being number one on his list and they're not being supported and their needs are not being put first. What is being put first, if it's not the department needs?"

Lawson realized that some needs were not being met. When he talked about the issues that he encountered during the interim period and how the staff reacted to his leadership, he said, "I'm sure there is a director or two that's scratching their head and thinking, man he's just not meeting my needs. Obviously I can't meet everybody's expectations to the level that they expect me to meet them, but, my hopefully my message is clear... I'm gonna help you." What he did not notice were the staff's behavioral reactions during the directors meeting. As mentioned

already, the staff seemed disinterested in discussing the strategic plan, but when the conversation turned and the directors started discussing work related issues and upcoming programs, they became engaged. They asked each other questions and offered to take flyers to hang up in their offices, at which the mood improved. One of those directors thought that a “good interim” would notice how staff were reacting and provide the appropriate amount of support but, “Unfortunately, that’s not happening!”

Lasting Effects of the Interim’s Charge

Based on how the interim was managing his appointment the staff were unsure if there were any lasting effects of the period. Although the fruits of the strategic plan would likely sustain a transition, it was only because it was an institutional effort, not a divisional one. One director articulated this best when he said, “I think that any VP would be happy to know that the division that they are going to lead is already in compliance with what the institution wants.” The rest of the initiatives had the potential to be reversed when a new vice president took the lead. Because of this, one director believed that the interim “is hesitant to make any major decisions or anything that could be seen as a big policy change because it could just be reversed in six months.” However the antithesis was true for another director. He wanted to see the interim “actually do something” so there was a lasting effect of his leadership. At the time of the interviews, many staff indicated that they had not had enough time to reflect upon the lasting impact of the interim leadership period suggesting that the effects would be known after the new vice president transitions into the job.

The Search Process

According to the university web site dedicated to the Vice President for Student Affairs search, the search committee had been chosen and applications were being accepted. When the

initial site visit and interviews were being conducted, the position had just closed. The committee had begun reviewing the resumes and conducting reference checks of prospective candidates. Final candidates had yet to be vetted out of the applicant pool. Dr. Jensen left in September and the web site announced the start date for the new vice president would be in July, the following year. This section of the chapter focuses on the how the student affairs staff reacted to the search for a new vice president.

Knowledge about the Search

The majority of the information about the search was disseminated through the university's web site. Aside from a campus wide-email, there was no formal communication to members of the student affairs division regarding the search. According to one staff member, "nobody's really explained it to us," but the majority still had a sense of how far the committee had progressed in the search process. Staff seemed to be categorized into three levels of knowledge. In the first category, staff were well informed because they sought information, as with the staff member quoted above. Five of the interviewed student affairs staff members were in this category. One employee who sought out information stated,

I know the position has just closed and they are actively reviewing candidates now. And from other people I know, I know they really hope to bring these folks in for on campus interviews between end of February, before Spring Break, early March. So a candidate can be named and start this summer.

The second category included those who had a general sense of the search but did not actively seek information from others or visit the web site very often. Seven of the fifteen interviewed fell into this category. The information gathered from others or from the web site revealed a less detailed account of the search. One director who fell into this category stated,

All I know about the search for the new VP is that the announcement is going out or has gone out, that they're accepting applications. They'll be doing interviews in April after the selection of the new Vice President for Academic Affairs. That the

goal is to have the person selected by the end of the semester with the idea of starting July 1st probably.

The remaining three staff members claimed to know nothing about the search process. They did not visit the web site or ask colleagues for information. When asked how comfortable one director was with the amount of information he had, he said, “I don’t know anything, and that’s been discouraging. I have no idea. We don’t have any conversations about the search, not even in the director’s meetings.” A member of the search committee, when confronted with the realization that some of her colleagues were frustrated with the lack of information argued,

And then I would ask, who’s responsible for educating the division on that? Because the interim VPSA is not involved in that at all. So should the President’s Office notify us or should the chair of the search committee? I don’t know because this is my first foray in this area as well...but the information is out there if you want to know more... If you have enough time to complain, then you have enough time to do some research!

The Search Committee

The president finalized the committee membership after soliciting input from the interim vice president on student affairs staff representation. The names of the full committee were posted on the designated web site. Neither of the representatives selected from the student affairs staff were directors nor did they have longevity at the institution. There was a mixed reaction to the composition of the search committee. About a one third of the staff was either satisfied or neutral about the search committee composition. Just having student affairs representation satisfied some of them. Because the committee was made up of a diverse cross section of campus that included faculty, administrators, and students, one staff member considered that a “pretty good variety” capable of finding good candidates.

One assistant director articulated a common concern about the lack of student affairs representation when he said,

I think it is actually interesting that the search committee is made up of only two student affairs professionals on that entire committee. Any vice presidential administrative position should have cross campus representation, but I feel like our division was not strongly represented on this search committee, not necessarily by the people they selected, but by the amount of representation.

One housing staff member expressed concern that no one from his area was represented on the committee. He questioned the decision not to appoint someone from his functional area because “we’re responsible for a great deal of revenue for the university. I think it would have benefitted the university to have had a housing representative, particularly the director.” Another director was very concerned with who the president chose for the committee chair. He said, “It’s disconcerting that someone from Arts, Music, and Theater is the chair of the search. Excuse me? What the heck do they know about Student Affairs?”

The second most common complaint involved the staff reactions to the experience level of the student affairs staff that served on the committee. The web site indicated that from the division, a coordinator and an associate director were members of the committee. One director thought that it was important to have at least one person who reported directly to the vice president on the committee and another wondered what the rationale was for their selection. She complained that “they may not know enough about the position” to adequately represent those who will be directly supervised by the new vice president. Only one director expressed to me directly that she would have liked have been chosen to serve.

Involvement in the Search

Being asked to serve on the search committee did not prove to be a priority to all staff. However, those interviewed expected to participate in the interview process and have the opportunity to provide feedback during the selection. Because many of the staff participated in the search for Dr. Jensen, they expected to have a similar experience. During that search, the

student affairs staff met with the candidates as a group. For this search, one director expected that the opportunity to ask questions would be afforded to the division so each could “find out what kind of experiences they have” and “to see if the candidate fits with our culture.” Just interacting with the candidate was thought to provide some reassurances that the staff will understand “what we are getting.”

Lasting Effects of the Search

The chosen candidate will be the product of the work of the committee. As a whole, the staff interviewed indicated that neither the search process nor the search committee influenced their expectations of potential candidates. A few directors seemed comfortable trusting the judgment of the search committee, despite the make-up. A few others resigned themselves to the fact that the president makes the final choice with one stating, “I’ll just have to put up with whomever they pick. I’ve just got to roll with the punches.” Another said, “A search committee can be made up a certain way, but I think at the end of the day, the Vice President is going to have qualities that the President holds dear.”

In general, the majority of the staff did not see any lasting effects of the search process on the division. Only one expressed concern over the long-term impact of both the pace of the search and the influence of the members of the committee. He thought the search was rushed and that has the potential for “long term implications” if the candidate does not have time to make an informed decision about fit. The same staff member also knew he had different leadership needs than those on the committee. If the committee only chooses candidates based on their own personal preferences, he might not be satisfied with their choices.

The New Executive's Entry

At the time of data collection, the search for a new vice president was in the early stages. The committee was narrowing the application pool and completing reference checks on prospective candidates. Still, staff responded to questions regarding desirable qualities of a new Vice President for Student Affairs and concerns for the transition, as well as speculated on their openness to the new leader. In general, staff were interested in finding a candidate with a depth and breadth of experience in many student affairs functional units, commitment to building relationships, and an empowering leadership style.

Approximately half of the staff indicated that one of the most desirable qualities in a new vice president included diverse experiences with many different student affairs departments. Jensen was criticized for neither understanding nor taking the time to learn about functional units where she had not had previous experience. One coordinator wanted the new vice president to be “more well-rounded because they can make better informed decisions.” More frequently, the staff indicated that they wanted the new vice president to have had previous experience in their particular functional area. However, a couple of individuals looked at the larger picture. One associate director wanted to ensure that the new hire did not just have the right titles to get hired, but the depth of knowledge to lead a division. She said,

I'm not so sure a person who's only worked in one slice of the pie their whole entire professional career and somehow or another still managed to be a VP or a Dean of Students someplace, is really what we need. I think that a person who has a smattering of experience or can articulate to me on paper, because I haven't had a conversation with them, that they have a working understanding of all the areas that are represented in our division. I think that's more important.

Another staff member considered more than just his own department when he expressed his desires for a new vice president. He thought it was important for the leader to understand the vision of the institution and have the ability to help meet those goals. He said,

I want somebody who has experience with where we're going... had experience with becoming a more residential campus and adding services that we don't have now, but those that we want. I want somebody that has experience doing that now so they can help get us there.

The interim vice president also had an opinion as to what qualities the new vice president needed to possess. He projected a need for the vice president of student affairs to be financially savvy and "know how to raise money or secure resources" as well as have the skills to prepare and plan for declining budgets.

Secondly, about half of those interviewed suggested that the new vice president would be successful if he/she builds relationships with units internal and external to the student affairs division. This quality was recognized as an area of improvement for Jensen and strength for Lawson. Inside the division, the staff expected the new vice president to reach out and build relationships by spending time with each functional area in order to create a culture of trust and support. For one director this meant that the new vice president "is going to have to be a people person... they are going to have to get down in the trenches with us and win our trust back." The staff are looking for an "affable and friendly" leader who "gets out from behind their desk" and gets to know them personally. Professionally, the staff hoped for a responsive supervisor who "reacts and responds to them" in a timely manner.

Building relationships outside the division were also important to some staff. The interim articulated the need for the new vice president to have productive relationships with leaders in other division on campus. Based on his experience, he recommends that the new vice president "immediately figure out how they can be a real team player for and within the executive team so that the relationship they have with the executive team members does not become a hindrance to another's effectiveness." A couple of staff members also thought that the Vice President for Student Affairs needed to be student friendly, working toward knowing students, and making an

effort to spend time with them.

The housing and counseling staff were both looking for a vice president who was empowering. Hiring the right person wouldn't necessarily mean that he/she had the right experience, but that they allowed the departments to make their own decisions about what is best for the department. As one staff member voiced, "I want someone who doesn't micromanage, that trusts the employees that they've hired to do their jobs, but at the same time be able to assist and/or give support as needed."

At four months into the ten-month interim period, the student affairs staff expressed their readiness for a permanent vice president. When asked about the transition, most indicated that they were willing to accept a new leader and answered from a division point of view rather than an individual perspective. Even though each person had experienced the interim period in personal ways, no staff member seemed unwilling to welcome a new boss. In fact, the responses indicated that staff were hopeful about the future. One department head believed that openness to a new vice president "is all very individual. I think we make choices and we're either open to it or we're not. And for the most part I think pretty much everyone in this division was excited about what the potential was, the future." For his immediate staff and for the other directors, another director commented, "I think they are ready for someone to be a full time vice president." Because the division was moving forward on presidential and division wide initiatives, one director was ready to see the results of all the hard work devoted towards those efforts. With the new vice president, she stated, "we can figure out what's going to happen, who it's going to be, and where we are going to go." After sharing that she was burned out from all the extra initiatives added to her normal duties and because her department was short staffed, one staffer recognized that a new vice president might mean more work or even change. Yet she

declared, “I do feel like we are ready... how can we not be ready?”

Because staff were ready, they felt positive about the impending transition. Their readiness not only made some staff hopeful that their needs would be met but that a new person would be a welcome addition to the staff. One director said of the staff, “I think people will really embrace someone new coming on.” This positivity extended beyond the assimilation of a new vice president into the division into how adaptive the staff would be upon their appointment. More than one staff member agreed with the interim when he said, “I will be very neutral and very open to any candidate because I will work with whoever comes in.” A few directors had been through a leadership transition on this campus before. This experience provided one director with the attitude that change was the only constant. He accentuated that point by saying, “I’ve been through this before, and I can roll with the punches. We’ll be good.”

Conclusion

As the findings reflect, the interim student affairs leadership appointment is multifaceted. The tone of the appointment is influenced by the precipitating campus and inherited divisional circumstances. While staff reacted individually to the succession management strategy of the vice president for student affairs, they understood the natural evolution of such in higher education. The transition allowed staff to reflect upon the influence of the leadership qualities, personal characteristics, and nature of their relationship with both the incumbent and the interim in determining how individual and group work was either facilitated or hindered.

Communication also proved to be an element that caused confusion during the appointment. The findings suggest that staff lacked the appropriate amount of information to understand the expectations of the interim’s charge. Therefore, the actions of the interim often left the employees, as individuals and as a whole, frustrated with the circumstances of their

reality. This resulted in decreased productivity and organizational factions. Also concerning was the lack of information about the search process. In both instances, the staff had anticipated more direct communication from top-level administrators. Although communication was lacking, the staff expected that the new executive would be welcomed and the transition to new leadership would be smooth.

Even though the staff did not foresee any lingering effects of the interim period, the findings suggest that unresolved issues among individuals and within the organization can affect employee satisfaction, loyalty, and commitment. Employees who felt concurrently overworked and unsupported distrusted their environment and their leader. This, in turn, affected cohesiveness and openness and readiness for new leadership. The findings suggest that the staff expect the interim leader to be more than a placeholder and that the interim role is important for leadership succession management at all levels of the organization.

CHAPTER V:

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The literature on interim appointments focuses on the frequency of use, goals of the period, typologies, and benefits of use, not on the reactions of staff to such an appointment. Farquhar (1991) initiated research on the reactions of staff to an appointment, examining organizational dynamics during interim administrations in the field of public administration. She suggested that the incumbent's departure, the events of the interregnum, the search process and the entry of the new executive are all important components to study. However, Mundt (2004) considered the charge of the interim important, especially in preparing for a new leader.

The literature suggests that higher education organizations are unique because so many systems of individuals and groups work concurrently and in parallel to accomplish one purpose (Birnbaum, 1988). Student affairs divisions are one of the major systems that operate in this environment. Sandeen (1991) proposes that the vice president for student affairs' primary roles include manager, mediator, and educator. Such roles are congruent with day-to-day responsibilities. However, the relationships that student affairs personnel have with their vice president appears to influence their perceptions of their work environment, as well as individual performance and organizational cohesiveness (Clement & Rickard, 1992; Guido-DiBrito, 1995; Winston & Creamer, 1997). Therefore, the vice president is responsible for creating an environment which builds cohesiveness and overall satisfaction at work while also managing daily operations. When turnover occurs at the executive level in particular, the work environment becomes more difficult because relationships are altered, goals shift, and allegiances waiver. In

response to this type of change, staff have both affective and behavioral responses (Ballinger & Schoorman, 2007; Bridges, 1986).

High-level executives in units such as student affairs are especially vulnerable to presidential turnover (Rickard, 1982; Winston & Creamer, 1997). In the site studied, a new president began replacing the majority of the administrative team early in her tenure. Whether the vice president had specific knowledge of her fate is unknown, but it is believed that she preemptively left the institution for another position. To fill the vacancy, an interim leader was appointed. It was during this interim period that this single-site qualitative study addressed the question: What are staff reactions to interim leadership in a student affairs organization?

Answering the Research Question

In order to better understand staff reactions to interim leadership periods in student affairs organizations and to answer this study's research question, the findings are organized into the five themes designated in the previous chapter (*The Incumbent's Departure*, *The Events of the Interregnum*, *The Interim's Charge*, *The Search Process*, and *The New Executive's Entry*) and summarized individually. Analysis of the results further compares the conclusions of this study to Farquhar's (1991) and Mundt's (2004) results, as well as existing literature, for consistency and contradictions. While many previous findings were upheld in this study, others were unfounded in the results. The answers provided by this study will inform both higher education and student affairs practice and future research into this topic.

Theme One: The Incumbent's Departure

This study focused on the reactions of student affairs personnel during an interim vice presidential appointment. The campus in which this interim leadership was studied experienced a number of leadership changes at the executive level, including the vice president for student

affairs, after a new president was selected to lead the institution. Every division on campus was impacted by the frequency of turnover that was created by terminations and resignations. The president commonly implemented the use of interim appointments to fill the leadership gap. At the time of the study, there were three other interim appointments at the vice president or assistance vice president level and numerous others among either academic deans or assistant deans.

The amount of turnover and the frequency created an unstable environment and anxiety throughout the student affairs staff. Even though the resignations and terminations had not occurred at the mid-level management level or below, many staff understood the ripple effects of the changes this new president brought to the campus. The student affairs work environment became directly affected when the vice president announced that she would be leaving Southeastern for a position out of state. The majority of the staff recognized that the president was building her own leadership team and that the fit between the two was less than harmonious. According to the staff, the lack of fit between the president and vice president directly contributed to Dr. Jensen's decision to leave.

Her tenure, fueled by the goals of the former president, had been filled with successful construction projects including a new student union and a new freshman residence hall. Under her leadership, the division had experienced the addition of staff, services, and programs in certain functional areas such as recreation, student activities, and career services to meet the needs of a growing student body. While some departments grew under her tenure, others, such as counseling, disability services, and testing shrunk. A few staff members were encouraged by Jensen to leave the university and other departments were forced to reduce programs and services. In general, during her tenure, morale was low in the division for many staff.

After her departure, the staff who were interviewed reported a mixed reaction to her leadership style. Staff who felt supported and empowered reported her leadership as effective and were satisfied at work. Staff who considered Jensen unsupportive and too directive considered her to lead with fear and authority. As a result, they were unsatisfied at work. Most agreed that she was decisive, direct, straightforward, detail oriented, and set high expectations for the staff. Her strengths were in fiscal and resource management, not in developing personal relationships within the division or throughout campus. Rarely did Jensen solicit feedback from the division as whole. It was assumed that she relied on a small number of people for feedback.

Although her resignation was a surprise to the majority of the staff members in the division, the individual reactions fell on a wide spectrum. On the extreme ends of the spectrum, one or two considered Jensen's departure as a personal or professional loss, while a couple of others celebrated. The most common reactions to her departure included either disappointment or relief. It was no surprise that the departments who appreciated her accomplishments were disappointed that she was leaving and the departments who did not hold her favor were relieved.

Jensen left within two weeks after resigning. The assistant vice president of student affairs, Drew Lawson, was offered and immediately accepted the president's request to serve in the interim. Although met with some reservations because he was not relieved of any of his previous duties, the student affairs division welcomed this internal interim appointment. Most appreciated his longevity with the institution and reputation on campus. He possessed the majority of the skills required for the position, but without a terminal degree he was not qualified to apply. Although Lawson lacked experience and knowledge in fiscal management and institutional procedures, he was skilled in developing personal and professional relationships. In contrast to Jensen, the staff thought that Lawson was less detail and more process oriented.

Although he was well-liked and respected, he was negatively rated on his response time to individual and organizational needs.

Theme Two: The Events of the Interregnum

The interim period was plagued with numerous initiatives and changes at the institutional, divisional, and departmental levels. In addition to the massive turnover among high-level leaders, the president launched her strategic planning initiative, which Lawson had agreed to co-chair before he was named interim vice president of student affairs. This institutional initiative dominated his interregnum focus. He also inherited dysfunctional relations with other executives. At the top of this list was the vice president for business and finance. This relationship, in particular, was of concern to many staff members. Lawson was also expected to reestablish relationships with academic affairs, advancement, enrollment management, and other divisions as new leaders replaced the outgoing.

Also at the division level, factions between individual departments became more evident. Under Jensen friction existed, but after she left, the rift between certain departments who were all housed in the same building were magnified. The fight over space utilization became a primary issue for the majority of the division. When this issue was brought to the interim's attention, the staff were asked to work together to find a solution. Many staff had hoped for the interim to mediate and engage in the situation.

As a whole, the division considered morale low during the interim period. They recognized the interim's efforts to address the problem. To improve morale, the interim created social situations in which staff could interact casually. Moreover, he was more inclusive in the director's meetings and instituted all-division meetings to bring all staff into the long-term strategic plan and theory to practice initiatives. Even though the staff appreciated the interim's

attempt to improve communication, many still felt uninformed. Because the meetings revolved around long-term projects, information regarding other campus issues or concerns of the administration did not trickle down to the staff.

At the individual and departmental level, the issues were different. Many departments felt either under-staffed or under-resourced in fulfilling their responsibilities. Inequity among departments was compounded by the perception and reality of the interim's inaccessibility. There were numerous complaints that the interim was unresponsive to questions pertaining to daily work issues and that all meetings, individual and group, primarily focused on long-term preparation. Even though individuals recognized that these undertakings maintained, or in some cases improved, the status of the student affairs division on campus, the staff yearned for a leader to manage their immediate departmental needs rather than planner.

In addition to the strategic plan requirements placed on each director, the interim proposed a more theory-based approach to student affairs practice. The directors were asked to lead the division and their respective departments in this effort. As a whole, the division claimed that there were too many long-range efforts going on and their daily work was sacrificed. Both of these efforts contributed to the various levels of burnout expressed throughout the staff.

Individual effectiveness and organizational productivity decreased during the interim period. The interim inconsistently responded to phone calls or emails. For example, individual ability to be effective on job waned due to slow by processing of appropriate documents for hiring and financial payments. Moreover, accessing the interim for advice on creating and revising policies was challenging. The slow (or lacking) response prohibited staff from completing some tasks in a timely manner or forced them to make decisions without the interim's input.

The organizational productivity decreased during the interim period as well. Because Lawson did not intercede in the argument between departments over space utilization, some complained their work was difficult to accomplish. In terms of the space issue, for example, both the testing and disability services office lacked adequate space for the amount of testers, some staff were unable to access the break room, and noise levels around certain office and meeting rooms were restrictive. There were just too many departments with different needs trying to use the same space. Productivity also decreased because the interim was addressing the president's needs before the division's. In his absence decisions were postponed.

Theme Three: The Interim's Charge

When the president called Lawson to ask him to serve in the interim capacity, Lawson assumed that he would have the full authority of the vice president. He was not relieved of any of his duties and responsibilities from his current job when he assumed the executive role. Based on his recollection, the specifics of the charge were not discussed. This trend continued for the staff. The student affairs staff were informed that he was appointed but neither the president or anyone on her staff nor the interim had a formal discussion with the division about the goals of the interim period. The charge, therefore, was based on the assumptions of both parties and ambiguous at best. The goal of the interim period appeared to be two-fold and included moving the division forward through long range planning and preparation efforts and maintaining the operational functions of the division.

First and foremost, the interim tended to the strategic plan. This initiative was of importance to the president but was not directly related to the interim appointment. This responsibility was carried over as part of Lawson's normal duties. However, he used the strategic plan initiative to advance the division. Directors were incorporated into the efforts before the

majority of the campus as they began shaping their departmental goals based upon the emerging plan. The division of student affairs more than likely assisted Lawson in the formulation of plan itself with their extensive efforts to assimilate the plan into their primary departmental purposes through countless meetings and individual work prior to the rest of the campus. This work was exhausting and consuming for both the interim and the staff, causing a lack of enthusiasm for the project.

The interim also took it upon himself to prepare the student affairs staff for the future in a different way. As he saw it, the division needed to polish their practice by establishing a division identity based upon student development theories. This added another layer of future planning to a staff that was already overwhelmed. However, for this initiative, the interim included the entire student affairs staff, from support staff to administrators, in the educative and planning process. Although the directors understood the basis for this strategy, others were uncertain how to move forward because the interim was not present for the meeting in which the idea was presented. He had been called at the last minute to meet with the president and her executive staff.

The staff and Lawson had different perceptions as to the priority of daily operational tasks. The staff understood that fulfilling this obligation meant that Lawson would be available to sign documents, process paperwork, provide counsel, train and supervise direct report staff, and maintain the daily operations of everything under the purview of the student affairs division. However, if Lawson understood that this was part of his charge, he fell short of the obligation. The charge enacted by Lawson placed less importance on daily managerial tasks. As a result, many items were put on hold or left undone and the staff were very unsatisfied with Lawson's ability to fulfill this obligation.

Both the staff and Lawson agreed that he acted as a caretaker. Even though he was not officially charged with managing the staff's emotional needs, he ended up assuming the role. Lawson tended to low morale among the staff by creating conditions in which the staff could get together informally and socialize. He also showed empathy to others by listening to and attempting to rectify problems that arose. These efforts attempted to improve relations between departments and individuals on the staff. Relationships outside the division also needed attention. Lawson took the prerogative to develop and improve relations between student affairs and leaders of other divisions.

Even though the majority of Lawson's divisional and departmental efforts were in preparation for the future, many thought the effects of the interim period would be short term and not withstand the entry of a new vice president. Moreover, even though individual needs were not being met, the lasting effects for were also likely to be minimal. The efforts that Lawson put forth toward developing relationships between the student affairs staff and on behalf of division were thought to have the most potential for lasting effects of the interim period.

Theme Four: The Search Process

The staff were very interested but relatively uninformed about the search for a permanent vice president. What was known about the search was discovered through individual initiative. At the time of the study, neither the president or members of her staff, the interim, nor any member of the search committee had informed the members of the student affairs staff about the search process. Information was available on Southeastern's website, but only a few sought information there. In general, the staff, other than those on the search committee, were uncomfortable with the amount of information they had regarding the search.

The search committee was chaired by a faculty member and included two representatives from student affairs, other faculty and staff from outside the division, and students. Neither of the representatives from student affairs had a particularly long tenure at the institution nor were direct report staff or even mid-level managers. Satisfaction of the composition of the committee was mixed but the majority of the staff agreed that student affairs should have more representation. No factions between staff developed as a result of the selection of members to the search committee.

Staff desired and expected involvement in the search process. The search commenced two months after the interim appointment. From start to finish, the entire search timeline was expected to occur over eight months. In regards to the search process, the staff anticipated being privy to resumes and participating in the on campus interviews in order to personally assess the fitness and relevant experience of candidates. Involvement in the search process was not expected to impact employee productivity. No major concerns over the lasting effects of the search process, composition of the search committee, or level of involvement were articulated. A minor concern mentioned by one staff, but overlooked by the others, was the short timeline. If rushed, the search may not be exhaustive.

Theme Five: The Entry of the New Executive

Professionally, the student affairs staff were looking for a vice president with both breadth and depth of experience. They wanted a leader with a variety of managerial skills, including sound fiscal administration, and experiences in multiple functional areas. The staff desired a manager who would be attentive, responsive, and empowering. Personally, they wanted the new vice president to advocate for the division, value relationships, and be inclusive.

The staff were open and ready for a permanent leader. They expressed hopefulness for the future and the eventuality of their individual and departmental needs being met. At the time of the study, the elapsed time of the interim period was only four months. However, members of the staff were ready to move forward; and their outlook for the future was positive.

Analysis of Results

The circumstances at the campus site for this study are not an unheard-of reality in higher education. A new president comes in, top-level executives leave, and interims are hired temporarily. While filling the leadership gap with an interim may be a good administrative and financial decision because it saves the institution money and buys time while searching for a replacement (Donaldson, 1993; Goler, 2003; Goss & Bridson, 1998; Inkson et al., 2001), the full extent of the impact to the organization remains unknown. The staff interviewed in this study were very candid and sincere in their responses and attempts to describe their experience during the interim period. The majority of the participants were at the director level (mid-manager or direct report). However, because the organizational chart was flatter, many staff throughout the organization had regular contact with the vice president and were impacted. Therefore, responses between the different levels of the staff were inconsequential.

The departure of a top-level executive such as a vice president for student affairs shortly after a new president joins the campus is a relatively common phenomenon (Rickard, 1982; Winston & Creamer, 1997). When the organizational situation is volatile and fluid, as it was at Southeastern, executive leaders often depart quickly (Farquhar, 1991). In this case, this vice president was the last of several other presidential cabinet members to leave. She survived eighteen months, tendered her resignation, and was gone two weeks later.

Negativity Towards Incumbent

Common staff responses to leadership turnover are both affective and behavioral (Bunker, 2008; Ballinger & Schoorman, 2007; Friedman & Saul, 1991). Farquhar's (1991) study indicated that individuals often report that the incumbent's departure most often surprised the staff, while creating stressful and chaotic environments. For the staff who were interviewed at Southeastern, the most frequent response was surprise. The timing of the departure, rather than the incumbent's decision to leave, may have been what caused the most surprise in the staff. Most staff seemed to grasp that new presidents often bring in their own cabinet early into his/her tenure. However, Jensen left in the middle of a semester, which may have seemed illogical to the staff. Her rapid exit in the middle of the term likely took the staff off guard.

Surprise was not the only initial reactions to the incumbent's departure. Consistent with Farquhar's (1991) findings, approximately half of the staff were relieved, the other half were disappointed or neutral. There were definitely two camps in this student affairs organization: those who held the incumbent in high regard and those who were unhappy under her leadership. This finding is also consistent with Farquhar's (1991) study that indicated that factions arose in response to the executive's departure. Although no baseline information regarding the organizational dynamics prior to the incumbent's departure was gathered, the factions became evident after she left. Perhaps those who did not favor the incumbent were either uncomfortable or lacked the confidence to express dissatisfaction.

Some of the findings were inconsistent with the literature. While disconnecting from the incumbent, the staff did not convey an emotional loss. Whereas, the findings of Bridges (1986), Austin and Gilmore (1993), and Farquhar (1991) found that staff experienced anxiety and confusion as a result of a leadership change, the respondents in this case did not. Also in this

case, the respondents seemed unconcerned about their own careers. While several wondered how the change might impact their work and position, no staff member considered leaving the institution following the incumbent's departure. Since no one felt his or her particular position was threatened, there really was no incentive to leave. Economic factors, budget cuts, and furloughs within the state may have served as the primary reason that staff were unmotivated to leave.

As for the incumbent's leadership/management style, again there is no base line data as to how staff regarded her before she left, staff often reflected upon the negative. The responses varied; no staff member was completely satisfied with her management style. While some labeled her as a "dictator" who used a "fear-based" approach to supervision, others expressed described her as impersonal and exclusive. This finding is consistent with Farquhar's (1991) study in that the majority of her respondents described the incumbent with negative terms.

Acceptance of the Interim

Using internal employees as interims is becoming a common phenomenon in higher education (McWilliam et al., 2008). The assistant vice president of student affairs, an employee with over twenty years at the institution was asked by the president to serve in this capacity. Hiring officials often turn to core employees for interim appointments. By Inkson's et al. (2001) standard, the assistant vice president is a core employee because the staff thought he was knowledgeable about the organization, trustworthy, and able to maintain organizational culture. On the surface, this interim appointment seemed more than appropriate.

Just as Farquhar (1991) found, the interim was well received by this student affairs organization. He had qualities that many student affairs staff appreciated and valued. According to Hoppe and Speck (2003), student affairs staff like a leader who is trustworthy, supportive, and

nurturing. The staff would all agree that the interim's actions towards improving morale and creating an inclusive environment demonstrated that he cared about both individuals and the dynamics between them. The staff were generally supportive in return. According to Clement and Rickard (1992), Guido-DiBrito (1995), and Winston and Creamer (1997), student affairs staff are more loyal and supportive of a CSAO to whom they feel connected. In short, the staff liked and respected the interim so they welcomed him as the interim and pledged their allegiance. Even if he wasn't liked, what choice did they have?

Even though the interim was well liked and respected, he had leadership/management shortcomings as well. He rarely responded to phone calls or emails, lacked knowledge about financial management procedures and other critical university practices, such as hiring policies. The staff were very frustrated with his lack of responsiveness but conversely seemed almost forgiving. Perhaps the interim was given a "pass" because the staff appreciated his efforts and had a personal relationship with him. At times, they seemed to sympathize about his workload. More importantly, the staff may have recognized that this interim was one of the few remaining high-level administrators and his priority was to please the president in order to keep his job, and pleasing the president would only help student affairs in the long run. Overall, in comparison, the interim's leadership/management style was seen as very dissimilar to the incumbent. This finding is also consistent with Farquhar (1991).

Productivity and Factions

As is common with interim leadership periods, the institution as a whole was plagued with numerous organizational changes outside the division (Farquhar, 1991). In addition to the substantive leadership changes and structural changes, the president had multiple projects and initiatives taking place concurrently. The strategic plan initiative impacted the student affairs

division the most because the assistant vice president, now the interim, co-chaired the committee. Leadership change, in and of itself, can often be disruptive and destabilizing to staff (Bess & Dee, 2008b), but to have major institutional initiative going on concurrently, magnified their worries. The respondents in Farquhar's (1991) study also reported that their work environment was chaotic due to the amount of change going on simultaneously.

As a result of the strategic plan and the leadership/management style of the interim, the staff were affected in two major ways during the interim period: individual and organization performance and staff cohesiveness. In higher education, the two are related because effectiveness and productivity suffer without organizational cohesiveness. Even though the interim attempted to bring the division together through collective planning and through morale building opportunities, functionality was interrupted. Lower productivity in the organization was also found to be a symptom of the interim period that Farquhar (1991) studied. In this case, the staff were looking for a manager and mediator, not an educator. They longed for a leader to supervise them, support their efforts, and intervene during staff disagreements. Interest in their own work was the main priority, not division identity achieved through educational planning. The findings also indicated that the longer the interim period continued, the more staff were impacted. At first, only the directors and direct report staff were frustrated because the interim was not meeting their needs. After only a couple of weeks, associate and assistant directors began to complain that the interim's inaccessibility and ineffective leadership style was impacting their work. There were complaints that meetings were canceled, decisions were put off, and questions were left unanswered which began to impact work that needed to be done. The staff would likely describe the interim period as a time when they were on hold, even though the

interim was trying his best to move them forward. Resistance to this type of change would have been lessened if the interim had been able to serve individual staff needs (Bess & Dee, 2008a).

Relationships between the staff also impacted organizational dynamics (cohesiveness) and functionality. Because leaders are responsible for creating conditions within the organization that build cooperation (Chen & Huang, 2007), the interim appropriately brought staff together on a regular basis, even though the practice was not part of the incumbent's culture. An environment which encourages staff interaction creates trust (Chen & Huang, 2007), thus builds organizational cohesion. In student affairs organizations specifically, Clement and Rickard (1992), Guido Di-Brito (1995), and Winston and Creamer (1997) acknowledge that the work environment is positively impacted when staff have good relationships with each other. The factions that arose as a result of the disagreement over space utilization became a large issue for many of the student affairs staff and impacted individual effectiveness. In this instance, cohesiveness was prevented because the interim did not mediate this situation as many of the staff had hoped.

The staff at Southeastern appreciated that this interim was attempting to repair and develop personal and professional relationships. In turn, the staff were more supportive of the interim, even though his inaction in others areas caused much frustration. Staff consistently rated the interim period more favorably than the incumbent's, as did the respondents in Farquhar's (1991) study. In general, the staff were more comfortable with the interim personally and trusted his motives. Even though much of their time was spent on future planning and productivity was disrupted, the staff in this study saw no long term effects of the events of the interregnum, supporting the notion that the interim provides a buffer between administrations, just as Farquhar (1991) found.

Ambiguity of the Charge

Birnbaum (1988) states that under normal circumstances higher education leaders either stabilize the organizational environment or perpetuate instability by their actions. For an interim, the hiring official dictates the goal of the leadership, as the interim is usually hired to either maintain stability or initiate change (Mundt, 2004). Usually, the nature of the departure of the incumbent guides the hiring officials decision (Goler, 2003; Goss & Bridson, 1998; Farquhar, 1995; Inkson et al., 1993). If the incumbent leaves unexpectedly and the individuals in the organization are traumatized by the departure, the interim may be charged with stabilizing the environment. If the incumbent leaves and the hiring official -- in this case of the president -- wants change, the interim may be asked to transform the organization through culture change, staff reorganization, or clarification of organizational values and purposes. However, regardless of the charge, the goal of any interim period is to ready the organization for a new leader (Chapman et al., 1988; Farquhar, 1991; Farquhar, 1995; Goler, 2003; Inkson et al., 2001).

Through this appointment, the interim attempted to both maintain stability and initiate change. He tried to create a secure and inclusive environment so that morale could improve and relationships could improve and develop. Due to his tenure and reputation, this interim represented longevity and consistency in an organization that was facing many changes both internal and external to the division. Even though the interim attempted to create a stable environment, he could focus on almost nothing else but the strategic plan and in turn, the staff were forced to do so as well. The agendas at all director's meetings, group and individual, revolved around the strategic plan. Even though the plan was still being prepared for the president, the directors were already asked to articulate how they would be incorporating the plan into their work. The staff did not argue over the long-term usefulness of this strategy and

how it might prepare them for the new executive, but complained that it interfered with their ability to do their work. They also complained that the interim was so consumed with the project, he was not addressing their individual needs.

The interim's charge was ambiguous at best. Being uninformed, or left to make assumptions as to what the interim was asked to accomplish, was unsettling and confusing for the staff. Even the interim himself admitted that when the president asked him to serve during the search for a new vice president, he assumed she meant he had the full authority of the position but understood that he was not relieved of his previous duties. The strategic plan initiative carried over from the interim's former position and for the staff overshadowed his real responsibilities which included supervising the daily operations of the division and the individual units. In short, this interim had two jobs and two charges. The lasting effects have yet to be measured but the staff agreed with the respondents in Farquhar's (1991) study in that they did not anticipate any lasting effects of the interim period. If the staff is prepared for the new executive, the interim has succeeded in meeting the ultimate goal of any interim period (Chapman et al., 1988; Farquhar, 1991; Farquhar, 1995; Goler, 2003; Inkson et al., 2001).

Insignificance of the Search

At the time of the study, the search for a new vice president was in the early stages. The committee had been selected and had begun reviewing resumes and checking references. During this stage, the only components that could be rated was knowledge of the search process, the composition of the search committee, participation in the search, and long term effects of the search on the division. Unlike Farquhar's (1991) study that followed interim appointments to completion and new executive entry, this interim appointment was less than one-third of the way through when conducted, therefore the findings may be difficult to compare. However,

consistent with Farquhar (1991), the findings in this study indicate that staff are highly interested in the search process, however the staff felt uninformed. The information was available to the entire campus but the staff felt as though someone (the president, the interim, the search committee chair) had a responsibility to communicate directly with the student affairs division to keep them informed. This never occurred. If lack of information caused anxiety, the staff did not express it; neither did they seek the information out themselves.

There was mixed reaction concerning the search committee. As in Farquhar's (1991) study, the search committee had modest representation from the student affairs division and was met with both positive and negative reactions. Two non-direct report staffers were asked to serve on the committee. Some staff members approved of their appointments while others thought that at least one director/direct report should serve on the committee to represent the mid-level administrators. The directors would have been more satisfied with greater student affairs representation and more experienced personnel from the division serving on the committee. This finding is consistent with McLaughlin and Riesman's (1990) assertion that composition of the search committee represents legitimacy and fairness of the search process. Unlike Farquhar's (1991) findings though, this search did not create factions between the staff.

All staff expected to participate in the search process during the candidate's on campus interview. Because the candidates interview schedule, resumes, and references were going to be posted on the web site, they would also have access to that information before candidates arrived. Many even hoped to provide feedback for the selection of the new vice president. According to McLaughlin and Riesman (1990), in higher education each constituent expects to be heard and participate in the search for their new leader. Whether they expected to participate because it was customary or because they wanted to feel valued, the staff had no reason to

suspect they would not participate. Because of the timing of this study, the applicant pool could not be rated. At this stage, the staff did not express any significant long lasting effects of the search.

It is interesting that the staff felt uninformed yet did not actively seek information about the search. Perhaps, the staff was too overwhelmed with the work they faced. Or perhaps, the staff recognized that the president was building her own leadership team and although they could provide feedback, the decision was ultimately hers and hers alone. In either case, interest in the search was high and the staff were uncomfortable with the amount of knowledge they had at the time. However, they did not actively seek answers.

The Interim as a Buffer

The staff anticipate the new executive's entry to be smooth. They are hopeful that a new vice president can simultaneously meet their needs and move the division forward. Even though the staff responded negatively at times to both the incumbent and the interim's leadership style, they desire a leader who has a combination of the two. They want a vice president who is detail-oriented, responsive, inclusive, informative, and values interpersonal relationships. In addition, they want a manager who advocates for the division and protects its resources with sound fiscal practices.

The interim has contributed to the staff's openness to a new leader. Devos et al. (2007) assert that trust in one's supervisor increases the likelihood of openness to change. In this case, the staff not only reported their readiness to move forward but also have trust in their current leader. The combination of the two suggests that they will welcome a new vice president and be as supportive as possible. These findings are also consistent with Farquhar's (1991) study as the respondents in her study also expected a smooth transition for the permanent leader, hoped for a

replacement that was different from the incumbent, and expressed a readiness for work to get back to normal. Because the staff were happier after the incumbent left and looked forward to a new vice president, the interim truly served as a buffer administration, bridging the gap between the incumbent and the successor.

In summary, the findings of the study are both similar and dissimilar to the conceptual framework. Major findings similar to Farquhar (1991) include

- Staff expressed negativity towards the incumbent after her departure;
- The interim leadership style differed greatly from the incumbent;
- Effectiveness and productivity decreased and staff factions arose during the interim period; and
- The interim served as a buffer between permanent administrations with no long lasting effects for the staff.

Major findings dissimilar to Farquhar (1991) include

- At the time of the study, the search was a non-issue for the staff, but they expect to be informed and included; and
- The charge of the interim was ambiguous and created confusion for the staff, thus impacting their expectations for the interim period.

Recommendations

Interim leadership appointments change the way colleges and universities manage leadership succession. Up to this point, research has focused efforts on the interim leader, not the implications for the organization and the staff. This study sought to (a) expand the research in staff reactions to interim leadership situations, (b) provide a more complete understanding of what student affairs staff experience during such an appointment, and (c) provide guidelines for

both administrative officials who appoint executive level interims and those who serve in interim capacities.

The revised framework was developed to help predict important factors when considering interim appointments in student affairs organizations. As public colleges and universities are faced with record student enrollment and diminishing financial support from the staff, institutions must find ways to help staff remain productive, even during inevitable leadership turnover at the executive level. Leadership turnover disrupts the organization and its members by upsetting the internal and external relationships and inspiring members to reevaluate the organizational goals and identity. Providing quality, consistent services to students and supporting the academic endeavors of the institution cannot be compromised because one person decides to leave.

Given that leadership change represents change in *content*, *context*, *process*, and *criterion* (Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999), the matter is complex. In interim leadership periods, the leadership succession is the *content* which is being changed; the environmental conditions of the organization provides the *context*, the actions taken by organizational members represents the *process*, and the *criterion* is the measurement of the change outcomes. The conceptual framework (Farquhar, 1991) provided a point from which to begin to study this phenomenon but additional findings emerged that further described the experiences of those staff members who are in the midst of an interim leadership period. If mismanaged, changes this complex can lead to short term and long term effects that negatively impact the individual, the division, and the institution.

While many opportunities for additional research remain, a number of practical recommendations emerge from the data applicable to the site institution as well as to the student

affairs profession as a whole (Table 2). Given differences in organizational size, staffing structure, and institutional goals, not all recommendations are appropriate for all institutions. Several recommendations are applicable to most executive interim appointments, notably the need for more direct and informative communication to the student affairs staff and the need for cohesive environments.

Recommendations for Practice

There are four main constituents affected by an interim leadership in student affairs divisions within higher education institutions: the president/hiring official, the interim appointee, the division staff, and the successor, all of whom stand to benefit from these recommendations. The president fills a leadership gap in her cabinet and advances his/her overarching institutional goals; the interim gains skills, knowledge, status, and compensation; the division staff have time to recover from the incumbent's departure and prepare for new leadership; and the successor finds the support of a president and reaps the rewards of the staff's readiness to move forward. Although institutional contexts and staffing structure sizes may differ, each constituent must consider all the recommendations for practice for a prosperous interim experience.

Table 2

Summary of Recommendations for Practice

Major Finding	Recommendation
<p>The staff expressed negativity to the outgoing vice president and positivity/acceptance towards the interim.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutions should consider hiring interims with contrasting leadership/management styles with styles contrasting with that of the incumbent. • Institutions should consider hiring interims who are competent but also well respected by various constituents and familiar with the specific campus culture. • Institutions should provide direct communication to the staff about the interim appointment to ease the psychological transition between the two leaders.
<p>Productivity decreased and factions arose between staff during the interim period.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutions and interim leaders should carefully consider the scope and number of initiatives introduced during this period to ensure workload is manageable for both the interim and the staff. • Interims should empower directors and rely on the expertise of staff during the interim period to lessen workload. • Interims should recognize factions early, find ways to reduce dissonance, and personally mediate as appropriate.
<p>The interim's charge was ambiguous.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarify the terms and expectations of the interim appointment. • Institutions should directly communicate with the staff the terms and objectives of the interim leader's appointment. • Institutions should make the charge achievable- relieve the interim (if internal) of regular duties or provide additional support/staff to assist with fulfilling previous responsibilities and designate a single/primary objective of the interim period.
<p>The search process was insignificant. However, staff expect to be included and informed about the search process.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutions should be forthcoming with rationale for search committee membership. • Institutions should communicate directly with staff as the search progresses. • Staff should have the opportunity to provide input regarding candidate viability.
<p>The interim serves as a buffer between administrations.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interims should encourage staff to evaluate the desired qualities in a new leader and to look forward to permanent leadership. • Interims should create conditions in the division that develop relationships and build cohesiveness and identity. • Indicators that measure the success of an interim's tenure should be created.

Accepting the Interim

Institutions need the right appointee for the interim position. When hiring an individual to fill an the executive position in student affairs, the president should consider the staff's perception of the outgoing vice president and look for an interim with a contrasting style. When the interim's leadership style varies significantly from the outgoing's, the staff begin to psychologically disconnect from the former reality and accept a new one. Creating a new work reality allows the staff to overcome emotional responses, such as anger, disappointment, relief, and even joy, to the departure. In doing so, they begin to look toward the future and forget about the past. Connecting with a new reality decreases anxiety over the change and allows individuals to invest in their work and move forward through a new identity. An interim with dissimilar leadership qualities would likely be welcomed to the division because he/she would not be perceived as an extension of the outgoing leader, but as a leader in his/her own right, increasing trustworthiness and the likelihood of followership.

Interim competence also increases the likelihood of followership. An interim does not always have to be qualified for the permanent position in order to be capable and qualified to accomplish the goals of the interregnum. The hiring official should evaluate the potential interim's aptitude in order to determine the fitness of the appointment and recognize that the staff desire an interim with basic skills to manage the majority of the division objectives. Competence also breeds trust between the appointee and the staff. If the staff trusts in his/her ability to fulfill the duties and expectations of the position, they will accept the interim appointment.

Competence, however, is not the only factor that facilitates management of the position's responsibilities. An individual who is well respected across campus also increases the likelihood of staff acceptance. As long as the interim is seen as a person who can maintain the division's

status on campus, as well as the institutional culture, both internal and external constituents will recognize him/her as the leader. For example, at Southeastern, the interim had served in the capacity once prior, which provided a basic competence, but he had a unique and long history at the institution, which increased the probability that he would preserve institutional and divisional values. Moreover, a leader that has status within the organization as a whole reduces the anxiety among the staff that the division will lose status in the organization without a permanent figurehead. The interim competence matters in that it provides a basis for the qualifications for his appointment, but it is not a deal breaker. As long as the interim has a general cultural competence and can navigate the ins and outs of the institutions, he or she will likely be warmly received.

Another way to reduce anxiety among the staff is for the president, or his/her designee, to speak openly with the student affairs staff about the interim appointment. Offering open and direct communication to the staff serves two major purposes. First, it recognizes the value of the division and assures their position in the larger university system. When staff feel valued, they trust that the president has their best interest at heart and anxiety levels decrease. Second, direct communication between the president and the staff conveys consolation for their loss. Concern over staff issues speaks to the president's overall sensitivity. For example, staff were extremely disappointed when the president's designee did not address the interim appointment as promised, leaving many discouraged and undervalued. The bottom line is that one cannot over communicate with staff about changes to their work place environment, especially when the change involves leadership.

Achievable Expectations

Another lesson for campus leaders during interim periods involves expectation management. Each party, the hiring official, the interim, and the staff, has their own perception of the scope and number of achievable initiatives that can be accomplished without the guidance of a permanent leader. Success of the period is based not only primarily on individual perceptions and expectations, but also on the feasibility of attainment. During the transition between permanent vice presidents, the staff will look to the interim for guidance. The interim should concentrate on a small number of specific achievable initiatives in order to keep the staff focused and productive. Having too many initiatives or projects can create a chaotic work environment that hinders individual efficiency and organizational effectiveness. Limiting the number of new initiatives and the scope of the interim's responsibility will allow for more manageable individual workloads and stabilize the work environment. This effort will decrease the probability of lower productivity from the staff. In addition, staff perceived that initiatives that involved organizational change and long-range planning may be erased after the entry of a new executive, so the commitment level may be low. More reasonable and realistic expectations of the interim and the staff include only projects that are necessary for preparation for the new leader.

Another strategy to prevent a decline in productivity lies in the authority of the interim and that which he/she allocates to the staff. In this case, the interim held the title of interim while maintaining his previous position, rendering him often inaccessible to the staff. The new position added considerable responsibilities to an already full plate. When this situation is unavoidable, the interim should encourage autonomy among the staff to make certain decisions, within reason, without direct participation of the interim. This type of empowerment would both ease the

burden on the interim and facilitate efficiency. For example, the situation in which the director waited over a month for the interim to sign and forward documentation to human resources to post a position only to find out the paperwork had been misplaced could have been avoided if the staff member had been empowered to independently manage that process. Perhaps the interim could have given her the authority to work directly with human resources so the task could be accomplished more rapidly.

When the interim has too many planned initiatives and is inaccessible, problems may arise between the staff. Factions can damage trust between individuals and change the dynamics between staff, thus impacting both overall organizational cohesiveness. Lack of cohesiveness not only hinders an organization's willingness to accept change, but also individual and group productivity. Working relationships that foster trust encourage staff to work out differences among themselves. In the event that factions arise, the interim must recognize the potential impact early and mediate. Campus leaders can learn from the division created between the staff over space utilization at Southeastern. If the interim had intervened earlier and participated in the mediation process, as the staff had hoped, conflict would have been avoided and productivity unaffected by the issue. Unresolved problems between staff members carry over into the new administration and render the staff unprepared to move forward with the leadership change.

Decreasing Ambiguity

The interim's charge determines the objectives of the period. In order to achieve the objectives, all parties should be clear as to what is expected of the interim. Campus leaders should take note that when appointing an interim, the terms of employment should be clarified before the would-be interim accepts the position. He/she should have an understanding of the goals and objectives of the term, level of authority, which duties will be retained from former

position, available resources, and any additional pertinent information that allows the interim to be successful. Before offering an interim, the hiring official should reflect on these questions and communicate the conditions of the offer. The would-be interim should weigh the offer and decide whether or not to accept the appointment.

Once the interim accepts the appointment and is certain of his/her expectations, the staff need to be informed. Knowing the terms of the interim's appointment will contribute to the staff's understanding of what is to be accomplished during the interregnum and how they are expected to contribute. This will aid in managing hope and disappointment with the interim's ability to meet individual needs. For example, if the interim does not have the authority to approve the hiring of new staff, directors should understand not to submit the request for approval. Likewise, if the interim has not been relieved of any previous duties, staff should be realistic about the interim's accessibility during this period. Discovering the charge and the restrictions to the appointment during the interim period, and not before, resulted in frustration among the staff because each individual had their own perception of the interim's job. Clarifying the charge and the authority of the interim through direct communication manages the expectations of the staff and decreases dissatisfaction with the interim period. Staff in this situation would have accepted an email tailored to the student affairs staff or a meeting with the directors to spell out the terms of the appointment.

Clarifying the charge, while critical, is not the only factor in managing staff expectations. The interim period objectives should also be achievable. During the interim period at Southeastern, the leader was asked to make changes and stabilize; achieving both objectives concurrently is an impractical request. To simplify and be successful, the charge should consist of a single primary objective; make change or maintain stability. Either will ready the staff for

the permanent successor. Implementing change and moving forward with long term planning allows the interim to lead the organization in clarifying organizational values and establishing a group identity. Maintaining stability allows the interim to meet the current demands of the staff and mend any current problems or factions. If the interim's charge requires him/her to accomplish both, he is unlikely to do either very well and the staff will be resentful of the ambiguity. Because the interim period is usually brief, the interim is likely incapable of accomplishing two time consuming missions simultaneously. Secondary goals should only be assigned to the interim, and subsequently the staff, if time and resources permit.

Inclusion in the Search

Communication is also a key component to the search process for a successor. Leadership turnover, in particular, creates anxiety and uncertainty for many staff members, therefore, campus leaders should be sensitive to this occurrence. When uninformed, staff begin to feel insecure about the future and their new boss. A designated official should be forthcoming with information regarding the rationale for the selection of the search committee. Neither the individuals selected to serve on the committee nor the justification for their appointment should be a mystery to the staff. Unanswered questions about the decisions made only lead to rumor and distrust among the staff. The interim, although in this case not a candidate and not on the committee, could announce whom he recommended from the division based on the president's criteria in order to head off any factions that could occur. The staff also needs to be informed about the specifics of the search process. In this case, the staff preferred a customized message that was different from the campus wide announcement. Open and direct communication reduces anxiety and projects inclusiveness, which this student affairs division valued. It should also be noted that because student affairs staff rely heavily on relationships to foster success, they expect

and desire to be familiar with candidates before they arrive and spend as much time as possible with them in order to assess viability and fit. At Southeastern, this information was to be made available campus wide through the search web site.

Preparing for the New Executive

As a buffer between administrations, the interim plays a critical role in leadership succession management. Staff naturally reflect upon the leadership qualities of the outgoing and compare them to the interim. In doing so, they begin to consider what qualities and qualifications they desire in the new executive. Encouraging this internal and group exploration allows individuals to identify what type of leader they wish to hire and the organization to build consensus. In order to accomplish this, the interim should focus his/her efforts on creating an environment that allows staff to collaborate, develop relationships, and build cohesiveness and trust among its members. Both trust and cohesiveness are known to contribute to an individual's readiness to accept change. Cohesive organizations generate a collective division identity, which facilitates change readiness.

If the success of the successor is tied to the interim's ability to prepare the organization for the new executive, there should be indicators that measure to what extent this was accomplished. Campus leaders stand to benefit from polling both the staff and the successor on readiness, openness, and preparation in order to evaluate the success and failures of the interregnum. This will inform future interim appointments in that campus leaders will discover, even if after the fact, what characteristics the staff valued, what hindered or facilitated goal achievement, how the interim period affected work, and if and how the staff felt prepared for the future.

Several of these recommendations require time and resources from leaders who already have a very full plate. As university officials make decisions about filling executive leadership gaps, these recommendations may prove useful in settling the staff into a new reality. Larger universities may need to consider how these suggestions can be applied to a more complex staffing structure.

Recommendations for Future Research

Student affairs publications are a mix of both academic literature and practitioner-based education. As interim appointments become more prevalent in the field, understanding the management of leadership succession becomes more important. More and more presidents are choosing to use interims to fill the leadership gap while building their own leadership teams. As a result, more high-level administrators will have the opportunity to serve in this capacity and many more staff will likely serve under an interim, if they have not already. Understanding these experiences will benefit university leaders at all levels by improving the psychological transition between administrations, enhancing individual and group performance, and preparing staff for new leadership.

Staff reactions to interim leadership in student affairs organizations requires additional study. Sandeen (2001) and Rickard (1982) have called for studies that seek to determine what happens to student affairs programs during leadership transitions. As the scholarly and non-scholarly literature suggest, interims are now common practice for this situation. Because the phenomenon is becoming a more accepted practice to manage leadership turnover and succession (Farquhar, 1995; Goss & Bridson, 1998; Inkson et al., 2008), use is expanding beyond business and industry (Donaldson, 1993) into higher education (Chapman et al., 1988; Farquhar, 1995). In fact, this was the second interim appointment, at the same institution, for the

same position in under five years. Research on this topic is scarce because the majority of the literature focuses on the time of sitting permanent leadership, not the interregnum (Austin & Gilmore, 1993). Having an understanding of the organizational problems that are associated with interim situations will allow the administrative official to predict staff behaviors and provide curative action. In addition, this study found the clarity of the interim's charge to be an important factor in the stabilization of this student affairs environment. This study expanded the framework provided by Farquhar (1991) and should be used in future studies on this topic.

Future researchers should consider the many variables of interim appointments: campus circumstances, size of institution and student affairs organization, and length of appointment. The circumstances at Southeastern State University may or may not have been unique but knowing how large turnover rates across campus influence staff reactions to their own turnover may provide insight on their perceptions of the incumbent leader and the interim appointee. A comparison between interims who are internal to the organization against those who come from outside the culture also informs about the staff's openness to the appointee. Size of the institution may also impact to what extent staff are impacted by executive leadership changes. In small and mid-sized institutions, where the interaction between the vice president and the staff is frequent, the nature of the relationship between them has the potential to have greater influence over performance and satisfaction levels. If staff are unaccustomed to frequent contact, as in larger institutions, the interim appointment may not be as impactful. Because the lengths of interim appointments vary, future research also should consider the duration of the appointment. Do longer periods increase frustration and decrease openness? Does the staff favor the interim more or less during short versus long appointments? Having data to compare all these variables would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how context influences staff reactions.

Research is also warranted throughout the interim period. For example, at the time of this study, the search was a non-issue with staff, however, the search was barely underway. Would staff have reacted different during this study's interviews if they were in the middle of candidate interviews? Would factions develop as a result of disagreement over the preferred candidate? Would staff consider leaving the institution if there was not an opportunity to participate in the search? Moreover, the researcher would be able to compare individual reactions and organizational dynamics over time. Do overall perceptions change throughout the interim's tenure or do they remain constant? This study hinted at this possibility. One interviewee indicated that this interim's inaccessibility did not prohibit his work early in the interim period; however, as the interim's tenure progressed, the staff member felt as though he waited longer for decisions from the interim leader and his work productivity began to suffer. Although the length of the tenure may be unavoidable at times, understanding how staff react during various phases of the interim's tenure can shape how long the president keeps him/her in office and predict staff behaviors at various stages.

Prior research indicates that the success of the interim is often assessed after the interim has relinquished the title (Farquhar, 1995). Research that explores what happened after the new executive is hired would serve a dual purpose. First, as Farquhar (1995) suggests, research of this nature would provide insight into the links between the actions of the interim and the success of the new leader. If staff understood the association, they might be able to reconcile that the interim period serves as an end to a means and is not a destination. In other words, the staff might not take the disappointments and shortcomings of the interim period so seriously if they understood the ultimate goal was openness towards the new vice president. Further research should also better define staff readiness. Secondly, research conducted after the entry of the new

executive would also prove useful in determining the lingering effects. The interviewees in this study could not foresee any long term or lingering effects but it may be too soon to realize the impact. Understanding the perceptions of staff before, during, and after the appointment may provide a more complete depiction of the phenomenon. Future interims would have an awareness that their actions have consequences and could formulate their approach accordingly.

Conclusion

Colleges and universities are complex organizations that are constantly evolving and adapting to the environment. Higher education administrators are required to have a diverse skill set that enable them to respond to change quickly, effectively, and with the best interest of the organization at the forefront. Because the higher education environment is so fluid and demanding, turnover rates are high among executive level leaders. Student affairs executives are no exception; in fact, they may be the most vulnerable when campus conditions change, as their turnover rate is among the highest of all executives except university presidents. Changes in presidential leadership, budget cuts, student trends, and career mobility all contribute to CSAO departures. This study focused on what occurs for the student affairs staff and the organization during those transitions when an interim is appointed.

Leadership turnover often evokes specific emotional, attitudinal, and behavioral responses for affected personnel. This study examined a specific type of leadership transition in which the vice president for student affairs resigned and the president appointed an internal employee to serve as the interim. Through interviews and observations, the experiences of the student affairs staff was documented, assimilated, and analyzed in order to gain an understanding of their sentiments as well as any changes in attitudes and behaviors at work. At only four months into the interim appointment, staff were both satisfied and dissatisfied with the

experience. There was overall acceptance and support of the interim appointee but frustrations with his inability to do two jobs at once; individual effectiveness and organizational productivity suffered as a result. Staff had a genuine affection for one another but still factions and disagreements arose. The majority were unhappy with the level of communication from high-level administrators and the interim regarding the charge and the search, but it did not motivate them to ask questions. And finally, the staff expressed excitement and hope that a new leader would fulfill their needs and re-stabilize the environment.

Success is in the eye of the beholder. In work environments goal achievement is subjective but based heavily on the actions of leaders and the environments they create. Interim leaders are not exempt just because they are temporary. In fact, they may play a more critical role than most realize. Interim leadership situations are neither easy to manage nor easy to experience. Studies that examine leadership succession comprehensively not only stand to inform future studies but to improve practice as well.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Staff Interview Protocol

The Incumbent Departure

What were the circumstances of the resignation of the VPSA?

Describe your reaction to the resignation of the VPSA.

Describe the leadership style of the outgoing VPSA?

Describe your reaction to the frequency of VP turnover rate.

The Search Process

Tell me what you know about the search for a VP.

What role do you play in the search process?

How has the search process affected your work and division?

How has the search process influenced your expectations for the new VP?

The Events of the Interregnum

*What do you think that the charge of the interim is?

What administrative or campus circumstances did the interim VPSA inherit?

What events are paramount during the interim leadership period?

What is the interim's background in higher education administration?

How would you rate the interim leadership period?

Entry of the New VP

What are the anticipated long lasting effects of the search process to the division?

What are the anticipated long lasting effects of the acting administration to the division?

How do you anticipate the transition of the new VP to go?

*Question added

Appendix B

Interim Leader Protocol

Tell me about your background and the circumstances that created the vice presidential vacancy.

Describe what was going on in the division at the time.

How were you appointed to the interim position?

How were the staff informed?

Why do you think you were asked? Why did you accept?

How has the position impacted your career?

How has the staff responded to you? How have they responded to each other?

What have you observed in the division since you became interim?

How is this interim period different from the last time?

What do you know about the search for a permanent vice president?

What are you looking for in a new vice president? How does this compare to the previous vice president?