

AN ETHICAL BECOMING FOR SENIOR STUDENT AFFAIRS OFFICERS:
PHRONETIC LEADERSHIP

by

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the leadership and decision-making approaches of two Senior Student Affairs Officers. Through in-depth qualitative data analysis and findings from participant interviews, conclusions were developed regarding how the participants' approaches to leadership are similar to *phronetic* leadership. *Phronetic* leadership is developed with an understanding of an Aristotelian conception of virtue ethics and a Foucauldian conception of regimes of rationality and relations of power. The effects of technical rationality and relations of power on the participants' abilities to practice and develop *phronetic* leadership were explored through the study. It is argued that *phronetic* leadership is a form of leadership that should be developed and practiced by Senior Student Affairs Officers, as this approach to leadership makes possible an ethical approach to leadership. It is argued that the moral philosophy of *phronetic* leadership—virtue ethics—is superior to the moral philosophy of leadership approaches that are technically rational, such as managerialism. Yet, the dominant discourse in higher education lends to practices, norms, and relations of power that are indicative of technical rationality, and not of *phronesis* (practical wisdom).

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my parents and to my partner in life, Lauren Bennett. Without the commitment and sacrifices by my parents I would not have realized the flourishing of an examined life. My parents continue to serve as yardsticks for virtuous character and the habits that are necessary to live a good life. Without Lauren's fierce loyalty, truthful advice, joyful approach to living, and forgiving love, this process would have been far more difficult. Lauren, to borrow from wisdom of Jason Isbell and Brandi Carlile, if it takes a lifetime, I'll always find my way to you.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

SSAO Senior Student Affairs Officers

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My family and friends have been a source of motivation, positive feedback, and source of humor and love during my life and throughout the process of writing this dissertation. I feel

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INTRODUCTION

“We cannot be really good without practical wisdom, or practically wise without virtue of character” (Aristotle, 2000, p. 118).

I would be surprised to learn of a student affairs professional that has not heard the statement, ‘we have to do more with less,’ as a rationalization for how one should operate as a student affairs leader. This is a mantra that I have heard paired with discussions of how to better conduct assessment in ways that show improving outcomes of a student affairs division’s efforts while ‘overcoming’ the reduction of financial and personnel resources. While working in student affairs roles, I rarely heard other professionals challenge the logic of doing more with less, and the values and priorities that are communicated through this logic. Doing more with less indicates that the value is placed upon achieving measurable outcomes, but it gives no indication that quality and excellence—or being guided by a mission and goals—are of primary importance, when compared to quantity of outcomes. Instead, the focus is on how much activity is occurring that can be quantitatively recorded in order to demonstrate a linear growth in outcomes that can be linked to fewer student affairs staff ‘accomplishing’ more while using fewer resources. I will not argue with the basic idea that leaders should be responsible stewards of the resources in their purview; yet, this idea must be paired with a truthful recognition that the practical limits of a leader’s influence necessarily shift in relation to the make-up of their team and the resources that are at their disposal. I reject unwise assumptions that student affairs leaders should think of their work through a production model that is focused on outcomes

because such an approach to educational practice holds ethical consequence for the students to whom student affairs leaders are supposed to be of service.

For those higher education administrators who recognize the values and priorities that are inherent to the message of ‘doing more with less,’ there should be a recognition of how administrative practices and decisions may be problematically impacted. For those educational leaders that do recognize the ethical consequences of a common sense that values efficient approaches to education more than meaningful approaches that are context-aware, there are still practical concerns regarding how one can challenge the dominant discourse in tangible ways. I suggest turning to the philosophies of Aristotle and Michel Foucault in order to better understand how the dominant discourse influences one’s practice as a leader, as well as how one’s ethical engagement with decisions can shift through a different philosophical awareness. Through this study, I predominantly focus on the Aristotelian concept of *phronesis* (practical wisdom). Because *phronesis* is values-conscious, a *phronetic* leader can consider nuance and complexity in ways that a technical leader cannot because technical approaches to leadership cannot consider nuance and complexity, and, in fact obfuscate it.

Technical approaches to leadership, such as managerialism, are informed by a rationality that I label as technical rationality. Leaders with an awareness of values (what Aristotle called virtues in his work on ethics) cannot only choose different actions than if employing technical rationality, they can also challenge and bring transparency to the faulty assumptions and problematics of employing technical rationality as the standard of operation for making decisions as a higher education leader. *Phronesis*, as developed by Aristotle in his two works on Ethics (*Nicomachean Ethics* and *Eudemian Ethics*), has over the last decade received greater interest by those concerned with the direction of education, especially given institutional schooling’s

emphasis on quantification over an ethical, virtuous standpoint in which the individual leader makes a decision appropriate for that particular situation, which is rarely generalizable (generalizability and universals are something that technical rationality seeks and claims to be able to achieve). Through this chapter I will briefly discuss the Senior Student Affairs Officer position, the concept of technical rationality, an Aristotelian understanding of *episteme*, *techne*, *phronesis*, and virtue ethics, the notion of a *phronimos* (practically wise leader), Foucauldian concepts of governmentality and regimes of rationality, and I will introduce my understanding of *phronetic* leadership.

Senior Student Affairs Officer

Senior Student Affairs Officer (SSAO) is a term that is used to describe higher education administrators who have the role and responsibility of being the top hierarchical leader for student affairs divisions for a given higher education institution. The functional responsibilities and kinds of student services offered vary for each Senior Student Affairs Officer—depending on the mission, culture, and context of the higher education institution that is the SSAO’s site of service. The considerations that an SSAO must take into account—when making decisions as a leader—vary across institutional type (i.e. private, public, or religiously-affiliated institution). I will focus this study on SSAOs who currently serve or have served at public higher education institutions; I am interested in individual leaders who have served at institutions with a historical mission of serving the public, because I think this necessarily brings different ethical commitments to the public than if one’s service is for a private higher education institution.

Background

I am concerned with how ethical decisions are made by leaders in a higher education setting, specifically by Senior Student Affairs Officers. Due to limitations of scale and scope,

this study is purposefully limited to Senior Student Affairs Officers. However, my interest in leadership is not limited to the area of student affairs. My interest in this topic developed as I gained experience as a student affairs administrator in graduate school and then as a full-time professional. In addition, volunteering on a professional association leadership board provided me the opportunity to begin to recognize themes of common sense practices and a dominant rationality; these became evident as I observed and participated in conversations and initiatives that were carried out by a volunteer group of professionals. While this study is a critique of a non-critical acceptance of common sense practices and adherence to a dominant rationality as the best approach to leadership in student affairs, a critique of individual leaders is not intended. As a student affairs administrator, I also participated in common sense practices, and I made decisions according to the dominant rationality. My awareness of the problematic ethical consequences of such an approach to leadership grew as I gained professional experience and as I pursued my graduate and doctoral studies—which aided in the development of nuanced language—and therefore logic—that enabled me to critique the absence of *phronetic* leadership. So, this study was in part an attempt to recognize and name the contours of what I now recognize as an ideal approach to leadership. This ideal approach to leadership is *phronetic* leadership, and the philosophical foundation of *phronetic* leadership is mainly informed through my study of the writings of Aristotle and Michel Foucault.

Overview

Phronetic leadership's conceptual foundation is in Aristotelian virtue ethics; in addition to virtue ethics, my understanding of *phronetic* leadership is grounded in a Foucauldian understanding of relations of power, knowledge, governmentality, and surveillance. These concepts will be discussed in depth throughout the second chapter of this study, as a thorough and

nuanced discussion of these concepts is necessary to conceptualize how *phronetic* leadership is different than a formulaic or skills-based approach to leadership. Developing a definition of *phronetic* leadership that can be objectively understood—absent of contextual considerations and the character dispositions of the leader—is not possible; in order to attempt to begin to understand this ideal approach to leadership one must study the practice of leaders who are exemplars. These exemplars can serve as cases by which one can recognize the similarities of leadership across various exemplars, as well as the differences that are necessary to lead effectively in different communities and cultures. In addition, I argue that in order to attempt to understand how *phronetic* leadership is different, one must engage in one’s own practice in a way that attempts to lead *phronetically*; this engagement allows one to learn through the process of lived experience that is understood reflexively, so as to practice continual development as an ethical leader rather than to understand ethical leadership as a point of arrival that is static.

The ‘greater good’ or ‘ideal outcomes’ are what I philosophically have come to understand as unrealizable notions that often inform approaches to leadership and decision-making. I argue that a leader’s awareness of a problem’s complexities is simplified—rather than complicated—when governed by such notions of ideal outcomes. I argue that complexities should not be ignored or pushed away from a leader’s awareness. Instead, a leader should embrace “thinking in the grey,” as was advocated for by one study participant (Joan). Even if a problem’s complexities do not enter the realm of a leader’s awareness, those complexities do not simply cease to exist for others impacted by the decisions of the leader. If a leader is underaware (e.g. partially aware, but not as aware as they should be) of complexities when making decisions, then there will be ethical consequence for the lived experiences of those in the leader’s purview. However, even if a leader is aware of a high level of complexity, their ability to make a decision

that can simultaneously address any number of considerations will inevitably be limited. This reality should be accepted by the *phronetic* leader if they are to attempt to engage with problems in a way that does not lead to paralysis in decision-making, and therefore, risk serving as a leader in name alone. Further, just because a decision is made does not mean that the impact or outcomes will be as desired or as predicted. This too must be accepted by the *phronetic* leader who chooses to engage in a committed struggle of the process of *phronetic* leadership. *Phronetic* leadership should be understood as a dynamic process to which there is not a defined end or arrival point at which one no longer needs to work to improve as a leader. Instead, the lessons learned through the leader's lived experience are continually turned inward through reflexive practice, and the leader's awareness continually turns outward so as to learn through continued engagement in their community.

The intention of this study is not to develop a leadership theory that can be adopted and applied in a linear, step-by-step, fashion by individuals who wish to become better leaders. Rather, my intention is to complicate the conversation related to ethical leadership and how the decisions of a leader always already have ethical consequence. Through the philosophical discussion of concepts, it should become clear that the process of *phronetic* leadership is a complicated process that is necessarily unique per leader. The background, formal education, lived experience, and community of practice of the leader all contribute to a conception of leadership as needing to be understood through the specific practices and dispositions of the leader. This understanding of leadership influenced the conceptual development of this study. My intention was to study exemplars of *phronetic* leadership whose narratives I believe serve as case studies regarding the process of *phronetic* leadership, including the challenges that a *phronetic* leader faces when leading in a technically rational system.

I am not pointing to a ‘better time’ in the past when student affairs administrators were ‘real leaders’ who all demonstrated *phronetic* leadership. I believe the inequities of the past—that also continue to shape the present—serve to challenge any false notion of the ‘good old days,’ because it should become apparent that the evaluation of the days as good is viewed through an objective lens that erases the varieties of lived experiences. The question of for whom those days were good and for whom they were not so good is a question that can be asked by a *phronetic* leader who incorporates a Foucauldian awareness of relations of power. I view this incorporation of Foucauldian philosophy as vital to raising a leader’s awareness of equity. While I view *phronetic* leadership as an ideal, the goals of this study are not to strive for outcomes that cannot be practically realized—such as to communicate that all student affairs administrators can become *phronetic* in their approach to leadership. It should become clear, through the course of reading this study, that such a goal of universals would be incompatible with the philosophical underpinnings of *phronetic* leadership. Instead, I intend for this study to contribute to a critical conversation regarding the problematic effects of non-*phronetic* approaches to leadership that often are communicated as being able to be adopted by a leader who learns a set of leadership skills or methods; I describe this understanding of leadership as a technical approach to leadership that is informed through technical rationality.

Technical Rationality

When referencing the existence of common sense in administrative practices or a dominant rationality, I am thinking and critiquing with Foucauldian theory. Thinking with Foucauldian theory makes possible a recognition of the existence of the dominant discourse in student affairs administration as being informed by technical rationality. So, the administrative practices that become defined as best practices by professional associations, scholars in the

academy, and by practitioners eventually become the common sense way to lead as an administrator. The similarities in such best practices can be traced back to a normalized rationality that normalizes administrative practices and policies that in turn have concrete consequences for members of a community. Technical rationality is the rationality by which it has become normalized to assume that the main values of education are efficiency and effectiveness, which is indicative of a production model of education where outcomes are sought as the first priority when making decisions (Smith, 1999). Feenberg (2010) provides a description of technical rationality and the related consequences of such a rationality:

“Rationalization” refers to the generalization of technical rationality as a cultural form, specifically, the introduction of calculation and control into social processes with a consequent increase in efficiency. In exposing the traditional social world to technical manipulation, rationalization also reduces its normative and qualitative richness. (p. 130)

So, some of the consequences of technical rationality are that the experience of leading is reduced in quality as decisions are already made for the leader. Therefore, the leader is often reduced to a technician who simply implements decisions that have already made through technically rational approaches.

The outcomes of higher education administration that are often sought are ‘well-educated’ students, who have achieved the outcomes of degree attainment and post-graduate employment. Further, the time that it takes for students to ‘complete’ their college education is used as a measuring stick by which to determine the efficiency of educational delivery. A rationality that focuses only on the outcomes of higher education, such as earning a degree, contributes to the development of an approach to leadership that fails to value—much less consider—the ‘how’ and the ‘why’ of education. The ‘why’ of education—as understood through technical rationality—are the tangible products themselves: an employed alumnus, a student who has obtained a degree, a citizen that has been certified as obtaining official

knowledge. Those outcomes can all be pre-defined in their understanding, and are supported through the development of an official curriculum which determines what knowledge is recognized as official knowledge. However, what is not prioritized in practice is a consideration of other reasons for education that are espoused in many institutional mission statements—such as considering how students are to develop character dispositions that they practice as they engage as members of their communities. Developing predetermined learning outcomes regarding the concepts of character dispositions, values, and citizenship is a more complex activity than simply using degree obtainment and post-graduation employment as indicators of student success.

Through technical rationality comes a devaluation of the practical wisdom and character dispositions of leaders that make it more likely that those leaders can make ethical decisions regarding complex problems; it is through this rationality that the virtues of intellect and virtues of character are not seen as helping to achieve the priority outcomes of efficiency and effectiveness—concepts that are often understood as being interchangeable. For a leader to ask questions of why a decision is being made, or how to determine what should be done, is viewed as an encumbrance on efficiency and effectiveness—when technical rationality shapes common sense. Such questions are viewed as being unnecessary and a waste of time when the desired outcomes have been predetermined. Assuming such questions should be suppressed simultaneously strangles ethical thought and the development of a leader’s practical wisdom. Since the outcomes have already been determined—through technical rationality—it is assumed that all that must be done is to implement techniques, methods, and policies that increase the likelihood that said predetermined outcomes are achieved with the greatest amount of regularity, predictability, and efficiency. The consequences of a rationality that does not value, and in fact

dismisses, the need for leaders to possess virtue of character and practical wisdom are ethical consequences for our institutions of education and society as a whole. Therefore, we must attempt to explain the impact of such a rationality on our society by studying the various ways it can be traced through tangible practices, policies, and decisions (Feenberg, 2010).

I am troubled by technical rationality's abundant use and imbedded nature in practices of administration and education. Further, its recognition as the common sense approach to administration is troubling, as it is extended and accepted through regimes of rationality that are supported by methods of surveillance (of the self and of others), official knowledge, and relations of power; all of these contribute to the production and maintenance of common sense approaches to leadership. I argue that common sense should not be confused with wisdom.

Phronetic leadership is an approach to leadership that I argue is one that may offer a response to a technical form of leadership whose moral philosophy I evaluate as inferior to Aristotelian virtue ethics. I seek to describe and better understand the ongoing challenges of becoming an ethical leader, specifically an ethical leader who is a Senior Student Affairs Officer. With a desire to explore the productive effects of technical rationality and potential alternatives to this kind of rationality, I turned my study to that of Senior Student Affairs Officers (SSAOs); these individuals must make difficult decisions that are entangled with complexities. In order to study the approaches to leadership and decision making of SSAOs I studied specific exemplars in student affairs leadership; these exemplars are individuals who I perceived as having consistently demonstrated virtuous character and practical wisdom over time. It is due to these demonstrated virtues and dispositions that I chose these individual participants to serve as cases from which the nuances of what I call *phronetic* leadership could be studied.

Philosophical Understanding of *Phronesis*

Universals are objects of knowledge, while particulars are objects of perception. When we deliberate, then, we must perceive the relevant details of each particular situation, and we must determine how best to achieve our desired end with reference to this particular situation. This perception is not simply perception of colour or other qualities; rather, it is perception of the various features and characteristics of an event or situation. (Vella, 2008, pp. 152-153)

In order to begin to understand the philosophical basis for arguing that *phronetic* leadership is an ideal, I must explain philosophical concepts that were studied in-depth by Aristotle. While the knowledge and skill of leaders are often discussed and explored when conceptualizing leadership, what is often not discussed is the character dispositions of the leader and the leader's practical wisdom. However, Aristotle explored those concepts and made a compelling argument regarding the need to consider the character dispositions and practical wisdom of a leader, in addition to their knowledge and skills.

The Greek concepts of *episteme* (scientific knowledge) can be distinguished from *techne* (skill) and *phronesis* (practical wisdom), "because what can be known by scientific knowledge is demonstrateable, and skill and practical wisdom are concerned with what can be otherwise" (Aristotle, 2000, p. 108). In other words, when only employing scientific knowledge (*episteme*) one is not able to seek different ends than those that are already in existence. Scientific knowledge (*episteme*) does not include skill (*techne*) (Aristotle, 2000, p. 206). Also, according to Aristotle's definition, a contemporary association that limits scientific knowledge to the physical and natural sciences would fail to encompass the sciences that he would have included as well (i.e. the humanities and social sciences) (Aristotle, 2000, p. 206). *Episteme* can be acquired through learning. *Techne* can be developed through a process of practice and experience.

According to Flyvbjerg (2015), a distinction between *techne* and *episteme* is that *episteme*, "aims at uncovering how things are that cannot be otherwise," yet, "the product of

techne is always capable of being otherwise or of being or of not being” (p. 342). With this distinction, Flyvbjerg (2015) writes that, according to Aristotle, “*techne* concerns what is variable, not what is fixed; it concerns pragmatics, not universals” (p. 342). *Phronesis* incorporates both *episteme* and *techne*, as *phronesis* is a form of reason—practical wisdom—which is developed through one’s knowledge, as well as skill gained through experience. *Phronesis* can be thought of as making knowledge and skill match up to coordinate and combine one’s knowledge and skills to be able to choose the appropriate action in a given scenario. Therefore, an approach to leadership nested in *phronesis* extends the awareness and abilities of the leader beyond the limits of technical skill and official knowledge. *Phronesis* is the most important intellectual virtue, and it is the form of reason that is utilized to determine how to incorporate the appropriate knowledge and skill to act in the right way—the right way being the way that is most appropriate when considering the context of a situation and what can be practically realized in action.

Phronesis is concerned with universals as well as particulars, and the knowledge of particulars is developed through one’s experience (Michelakis, 1961, p. 77; Vella, 2008, p. 152). According to Bent Flyvbjerg (2006), who draws on Aristotle’s conception of *phronesis*, “*Phronesis* concerns values and goes beyond analytical, scientific knowledge (*episteme*) and technical knowledge or know how (*techne*) and it involves judgements and decisions made in the manner of a virtuoso social actor” (p. 371). Flyvbjerg (2015) describes *phronesis* as being concerned with acting in a manner that is concerned with what is good or bad for humanity; specifically, *phronesis* is concerned with, “an analysis of values and their implications for action” (p. 342). According to Aristotle (2000), the practically wise person is focused on the particulars of a scenario that allow one to determine what can be achieved through action:

Practical wisdom...is concerned with human affairs, namely, with what we can deliberate about. For deliberating well, we say, is the characteristic activity of the practically wise person above all; but no one deliberates about what cannot be otherwise, or about what has no goal that consists in a good achievable in action. The person unqualifiedly good at deliberation is the one who tends to aim, in accordance with his calculation, at the best of the goods for a human being that are achievable in action. (p. 110)

The practically wise person aims for the best outcomes (for humans) that can be achieved through actions, and these actions are deliberated upon with particulars in mind; one gains knowledge of particulars through experiences (Aristotle, 2000, p. 110-111). It is partially through experience that a practically wise leader is able to address problems in a different and more contextually-situated manner than can be addressed by a leader who is limited to the application of skill and/or scientific knowledge. Hence, the argument presented in this study that *phronetic* leadership is an ideal approach to leadership—when compared to the possibilities offered by technically rational approaches to leadership.

Phronetic Ethics (Virtue Ethics)

Phronesis is concerned with particulars, and it is informed through practical experience; this allows for *phronesis* (practical wisdom) to serve as a dynamic form of ethics when making decisions. This is a form of ethics that is not limited to a codified (and likely written) form of ethics; rather, it is a form of ethics that resides with an individual *phronimos* (practically wise person) who is able to apply *phronetic* ethics due to their skill, practical experience, character, and intelligence. *Phronesis* has a different view of ends and means than the view offered through technical rationality. *Phronesis* views the ends and means as in constant conversation with one another; the means must be chosen in accordance with standards of excellence, values, and ethical norms which are internal to one's organization or community. Further, the end is not viewed as being separate from the actions (means) one takes, but instead the end is sought through one's actions (Smith, 1999). Aristotle (2000) explained that practically wise people are

those who, “calculate well to promote some good end that lies outside the ambit of a skill; so, where living well as a whole is concerned, the person capable of deliberation will also be practically wise” (p. 107). According to Aristotle’s conception of *phronesis*, it is not a skill or form of logic that can be adopted when needed for a given situation; instead, *phronesis* is only possible for those who are good, according to the manner in which they live their lives.

Therefore, *phronetic* ethics cannot be developed or acquired over a short period of time, or utilized as needed—similar to wearing a coat when it rains. Instead, one must have the right conditions, character dispositions, and experiences to develop as a *phronetic* leader who is capable and equipped to make decisions that consider what decision will be the best decision for a particular community.

To explore what it means to live one’s life in a good way, one must turn to the moral philosophy of *Phronesis*, which is virtue ethics. According to Aristotle, what makes any action right is that the action is virtuous, rather than vicious (Aristotle, 2000, p. xvii). An individual comes to have virtues of character (i.e. courage, generosity, truthfulness, etc.) through habits. While character virtues are developed through consistent habituation, the intellectual virtues (including *phronesis* as the most important of the intellectual virtues) are acquired primarily through being taught about them (Aristotle, 2000, p. xiv). So, one develops character virtues through the repeated performance of just actions, courageous actions, etc. It is through the habit of carrying out these actions in a virtuous manner that one hones and acquires virtues of character (understood as character dispositions). According to Aristotle, an action is virtuous when it is chosen by an individual—from among other possible actions—as being the most virtuous action that can be taken within that specific context. An action cannot be understood as virtuous when the action is not intentionally chosen by an individual as being the best action. So,

virtues are character dispositions that one develops through the practice and habituation of deciding on an action that falls between vice and deficiency (Aristotle, 2000, p. xv). The person who has virtue of character is therefore most often able to act in a way that is the right way to act, at the right time, and for the right reasons. This will vary according to the given situation; therefore, a quantitative measure of how brave or generous someone should be in a given situation cannot be determined in advance—which means an individual is not courageous in a static sense but rather consistently demonstrates the ability to choose the appropriately courageous action in a variety of situations; this is because one is not a standard level of courageous across all contexts. Instead, one must choose how to act courageously when considering the practical limits placed on them in any given scenario. An ideal action is best determined by the virtuous actor who can choose the right action due to their character dispositions. This virtuous actor is known as a *phronimos*.

Phronimos

The *phronimos* has developed and acquired both the intellectual virtue of *phronesis* and the character virtues through experience and practice. The term *phronimos* is used by Sellman (2012) to define the *professional phronimos* (the professionally wise practitioner) (p. 116). The practically wise leader can act in a manner that is not predetermined and limited to formulaic and linear modes of operation. Because the practically wise person (*phronimos*) is concerned with that which is variable and particular, the *phronimos* will have developed their practical wisdom through practical experience; therefore, the *phronimos* will have acquired what will appear to many as practical common sense (Flyvbjerg, 2015). A *phronimos* does not dismiss scientific knowledge and skill as being unimportant; contrary to this misunderstanding, they use knowledge and skill—along with cleverness—to determine the best action that can be practically

achieved (Aristotle, 2000). Wisdom, per Aristotle (2000), is the combination of intellect—regarding what is by nature most honorable—with scientific knowledge:

Nor is practical wisdom concerned only with universals. An understanding of particulars is also required, since it is practical, and action is concerned with particulars. This is why some without knowledge—especially those with experience—are more effective in action than those with it. (p. 110)

A *phronimos* is not only concerned with what is good for them as an individual, but primarily how they can act in a manner that achieves greater equity for others. He explained,

For we attribute discernment, judgement, practical wisdom, and intellect to the same people, saying that they have discernment and thereby intellect, and that they are practically wise and have judgement. For all these capacities are to do with the last things—particular things—and being a person of judgement, a person of sound discernment, or a discerning person, consists in the capacity to judge in those matters that are of concern to the practically wise person. For what is equitable is the common concern of all good people in their relations with others. (p. 114)

While Aristotle recognized equity as a concern of good people, I believe that a leader's awareness of what can be understood as equitable, in any given community, is less than ideal if Foucault's philosophical concepts are not adopted in a complementary fashion with Aristotle's philosophical concept of *phronesis*. I argue that a *phronimos* (practically wise person) is drawn to not only become aware of, but also consider how the Foucauldian concepts of relations of power, regimes of rationality, and governmentality affect one's judgments and actions; an understanding of these concepts is strengthened through the study of Michel Foucault's scholarly works. While relations of power, regimes of rationality, and governmentality likely are not a concern—according to a strictly Aristotelian definition of what constitutes a *phronimos*—I argue that the complexity of our social communities and social arrangements requires that these concepts become a practical concern that must be considered by a *phronimos* who serves as a leader for a public community; therefore, the *phronimos* must adjust their decisions with an awareness of changes in equity and social norms.

Michel Foucault's philosophical work has been studied in order to question what often become common sense practices in institutional settings (Epseland & Sauder, 2007; Sauder & Epseland, 2009; Walker, 2009 as cited in Marion & Gonzales, 2014). It is through these common sense practices that issues surrounding equity often appear invisible to administrative leaders, as well as how their own approaches to leadership contribute to a perpetuation of inequitable relations between members of a higher education community. Foucault (1991) argued that certain practices become common sense through regimes of rationality that are normalized and accepted over time. Technical rationality is the regime of rationality that I argue has become the predominant form of rationality by which certain practices and approaches appear as the common sense choice when higher education leaders make decisions. Further, higher education leaders are not only influenced by such a regime of rationality, the leaders themselves perpetuate, extend, and normalize technical rationality by serving as governors of others' behavior, by self-surveilling their own behavior, and by communicating certain values as being of greater priority than other values (e.g. efficiency is more important than equity). Perceptual realities are thereby developed and maintained so as to serve as the means by which decisions are made and problems are evaluated by leaders (Foucault, 1991); as perceptual realities are influenced the particulars of any situation therefore are also altered for leaders who do not have a critical awareness of how their own perceptions are shaped by regimes of rationality. In effect, a dampener or blinder is placed over the perceptual breadth and depth of leaders through technical rationality. The leader has the 'freedom' to make decisions in so far as their approach to leadership is deemed acceptable by the norms of the community and through the lens of the dominant rationality—technical rationality. However, without a form of critical perception (e.g. *phronesis*) that allows

the leader to recognize and practically challenge problematic common sense and the status quo, a leader's decisions will only serve to reproduce and extend normalized policies and practices.

Phronetic Leadership

It is important to recognize that *phronesis* cannot be separated from the individual *phronimos*, at least not in the manner that *techne* or *episteme* can be distinctly described as existing as a kind of knowledge or know-how that is not dependent on the character dispositions and practical wisdom of any individual. This is because the intellectual virtue of *phronesis* works in accord with the individual's virtue of character. *Episteme* involves universals, and, therefore, these universals can be known by anyone. *Techne* is a skill; while the acquisition of a skill can vary in form, the manner in which the skill can be honed and taught is established within a relatively defined standard. The relatively concrete nature of *techne* can be credited with its focus on a specific kind of production. However, *phronesis* is difficult (if not impossible) to describe or study without studying specific examples or cases of an individual *phronimos*, and their specific context. These individuals (e.g. cases) serve as exemplars for the studying of virtuous action. For, not everyone is or can become a *phronimos*. The previous statement contains elements that are likely to be perceived as possessing a tone of exclusion and elitism, which I recognize from a perceptual standpoint may constitute a slippery slope at a time when higher education communities are at least rhetorically focused on efforts of inclusion and greater access. However, the statement stays true to an understanding of the complex understanding of virtue ethics and *phronesis* as depending on the right kind of character dispositions, resources, mentors, environment, and habits being present. A different evaluation and description that does not recognize the necessary presence of such conditions for *phronesis* would not only be a philosophically incompatible understanding of *phronesis* and virtue ethics, it would also be a

disingenuous and dishonest description. One must open themselves to a struggle of engaging with the complexity of ideas associated with *phronetic* leadership, rather than attempting to boil it down to bones of universals that do not exist; if an intellectual approach is taken that is epistemically incompatible with the moral philosophy of *phronesis* and if human nature is not understood as seeking the end of *eudemonia* (human flourishing), then an acceptance of *phronetic* leadership as an ideal will never be possible.

A shift in understanding from other leadership theories must take place in order to explore the intricacies of *phronetic* leadership; a different epistemological stance is required than the one that present the theories of transformational leadership or transactional leadership as being ideal approaches for leadership. Further, the notion that a leadership theory can simply be acquired through learning, as if it is objective knowledge, and then applied successfully by any individual (regardless of the individual's character dispositions, community contexts, and practical wisdom) must be rejected from the epistemological stance that I take in this study. I assess these other leadership theories are too elementary and simplistic in their understanding and awareness of the complexities that influence the individual leader (perhaps due to being nested in a positivistic epistemological understanding of human behavior); the leader's skills, knowledge, wisdom, and the contextual considerations (values, relations of power, resource availability, etc.) that influence the leader's practice, as well as the assumptions that form the foundational understandings of leadership, are what allows these other theories to be developed and are what makes the theories philosophically inferior to the theory of *phronetic* leadership. With an attempt to map the anatomical structure of the bones, ligaments, and muscles of 'leadership' technical theories of leadership miss the mark before they even begin. These beginning assumptions are part of the very problem which I wish to address. Just because a

theory of leadership is easy to understand, or because it appears as common sense, does not mean that it is a truthful depiction of an ideal of leadership. In fact, I would argue that one should inject a healthy dose of skepticism when considering any theory that may appear as common sense; that common sense may be rooted in a regime of rationality that has unknowingly shaped what appears to be a universal truth.

Statement of the Problem

“There is an important dimension of leadership not often discussed in the professional literature of student affairs because it is so difficult to define and measure. This dimension or aspect of leadership is practical wisdom.” (Dalton, 2002, p. 3)

Phronetic leadership may not be consciously rejected as an ideal approach for ethical leadership; however, the dominance of technical rationality is apparent. Through this rationality approaches to leadership attempt to codify decision-making and ultimately exclude contextual considerations. Higher education leaders should be taking account of these contextual considerations when considering the ethical elements of any decision that will impact the communities to which they are of service. I perceive most SSAOs as lacking exposure to the philosophical foundation of *phronesis*. There is a disciplinary dominance of technical rationality in higher education leadership graduate programs, in field-specific professional associations, and in the normalized practices of work in the field. However, this does not mean that there are not SSAOs who demonstrate *phronetic* leadership. The problem I see is that there is a lack of awareness regarding the need for this kind of leadership, especially as the discourse of technocracy increasingly shapes the margins of freedom in action for SSAOs, and thereby strictly guides the accepted ways in which college students are educated; as John Dewey wrote, “mass production is not confined to the factory” (1991 [1927], 116 as cited in Pinar, 2004, p. 210). As technical rationality dominates the accepted manner of decision-making in the field,

fewer questions can be asked regarding equity, justice, and values, as administrative policies are made and best practices are determined. The problem is that SSAOs need to develop and act through their practical wisdom, so as to resist making unwise decisions that are informed only by technical rationality.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore if SSAOs value practical wisdom in decision making, even if they were not already aware of Aristotle's theory regarding *phronesis*. In addition, I sought to understand how the individual participants' *phronetic* leadership abilities have been limited by the relations of power and forms of surveillance (constituting productive effects of technical rationality) which delineate which practices are accepted and normalized. This research should have contributed to helping develop the participants' *phronetic* approaches to leadership, so that they may engage in wise actions that seek to connect means and ends and therefore practice contextually-situated decision-making approaches; *phronetic* leaders can marry contemplation of philosophical possibilities with their own experience within their communities of practice (higher education institutions). This study challenges the assumptions of what is made possible through traditional notions of technocratic leadership, which exclude the ethical potential offered through *phronetic* leadership.

Significance of the Study

This study has attempted to bring transparency to the political, ethical, and leadership challenges that are faced by SSAOs as they attempt to lead their respective divisions at various higher education institutions. The effects of governmentality that complicate the SSAO's freedom in action are a key area that I hope to have brought transparency to through this study. I hope to have complicated assumptions of what it means to serve as a socially just administrator.

Further, through a call for the ideal of *phronetic* leadership that is learning through wise practice, I hope that questions regarding the morally right thing to do at the right time will be asked more often. This includes a need for SSAOs to interrogate their assumptions, ideologies, and ways in which they continue to perpetuate the status quo. I hope that this research assists participants in recognizing instances of inequity and the power relations, of which they are a part, in the future. Perhaps reflection on their experiences will aid other SSAOs, or those striving to become a SSAO, in developing an openness to *phronetic* leadership as an ideal approach to leadership. If my research benefits no one else, I hope that the study participants benefitted from reflexive practice during the study. Participants should benefit from this reflexive practice, as it should assist them in continuing to consider the unique contexts in which they make decisions in the future.

Research Questions

- 1) What decision making and leadership approaches do SSAOs say they use when taking action as an SSAO, and how do these approaches appear similar or different than *phronetic* leadership?
- 2) How are SSAOs' leadership and decision-making approaches guided by technical rationality in higher education, by power relations, as well as by their own lived experiences?

I attempted to address these questions by interviewing two individuals who have served as Senior Student Affairs Officers, and who both possess professional experience at several higher education institutions. I perceive their diversity of experience, at different institutions, as having enhanced their ability to describe differences and similarities in experience across institutional cultures.

Summary

In this introduction/chapter, I have discussed the prevalence of technical rationality in higher education administration. I briefly described the Senior Student Affairs Officer position, as well as why I am interested in studying the leadership and decision-making approaches of individual leaders who have served as Senior Student Affairs Officers. Overviews of technical rationality, *episteme*, *techne*, *phronesis*, virtue ethics, *phronimos*, and *phronetic* leadership were provided. Additionally, introductions to the Foucauldian concepts of power relations, governmentality, and regimes of rationality were provided. Finally, I provided a rationale for the purpose of this study, as well as the research questions that guided this study. In the following chapter I will look to the literature to expand upon each of these areas.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Through this study I explored *phronesis* as leadership, which I term *phronetic* leadership. I argue that this is leadership that can bring contextually-situated ethics into the decision-making process for leaders; specifically, those leaders who make decisions that affect not only staff directly reporting to the leader, but also other members of the institution's community (students, faculty, and staff) who will be directly and indirectly affected by decisions. Literature that discusses both *phronesis* and Senior Student Affairs Officers was noticeably absent during my thorough review of the literature. In order to make my case for *phronetic* leadership I will discuss the dominant discourse (e.g. technical rationality) that currently controls institutional operations and dictates what decisions are possible and not possible within the binary systems under which technical rationality, as well as relations of power, support or are supported by this dominant discourse, and how they function to give the impression that a leader is granted the ability to freely make a decision. A beginning assumption is that all decisions, no matter how seemingly minor or major, always already have ethical components embedded within their concerns, and in actuality, decisions are guided by a type of either/or approach that in effect removes any real decision-making freedom from the individual in that the decision comes predetermined, and the individual leader is merely the vehicle through which the decision is implemented. In this chapter I will begin with a historical and theoretical discussion about technical rationality, its meaning and its effects within higher education, as well as how technical rationality works in concert with Foucault's notion of power to preserve the system and hinder any individual's attempts to employ *phronesis*. I will then move to a discussion on *phronesis*, its

history, theoretical assumptions and how it has been discussed, and the extent to which it can and cannot function usefully in a technically rational system; in fact, significant is *phronesis*' ability to disrupt technical rationality and the relations of power operating toward predetermined ethical decision-making. From there I will discuss the Senior Student Affairs Officer (SSAO), including an overview of the kind of responsibilities individuals in these positions hold and the corresponding decisions they face, all while navigating the margins of freedom of action. The margins of freedom are maintained through practices informed by technical rationality and the relations of power of higher education communities that are the sites of practice for Senior Student Affairs Officers.

Technical Rationality

We are threatened by our technology in ways we can no longer ignore and confronted with our own responsibility and unsuspected powers in a startling reversal of common assumptions. The threat is systematic and resists the familiar modes of critique we have deployed against superstition since the Enlightenment. New ways of understanding and criticizing technology are necessary to enable us to separate the rational core of our technological achievements from undesirable aspects that might be eliminated under a different political dispensation. (Feenberg, 2010, p. 124)

The rate at which technical rationality has shaped life in the United States through socio-technical changes has happened so quickly that it is difficult to comprehend all the ways in which human existence has been impacted. According to Davis (1981), "these transformations have succeeded each other so rapidly and their effects have been so unsettling, however, that it has been difficult to understand their significance" (p. 64). The effects of technical rationality have perhaps had the greatest impact on the practices of politics and government (Davis, 1981). Davis (1981) describes bureaucracy in the following way:

Bureaucracy is a method of organizing administrative and white collar work to override worker spontaneity and ensure calculability of results. In its traditional form, bureaucracy exhibits a number of characteristic features. First, an administrative hierarchy is established, and individuals with specialized training fill the various positions in it. Frequently, elaborate manuals of procedure, prepared by experts, describe what steps must be taken by employees in the various situations and cases they are expected to encounter. Nothing is left to the worker's imagination or free choice, so that predetermined results will be obtained. (p. 118)

The practice of politics and government of course affects the way that education is valued, understood, practiced, and how educational institutions are organized. Bureaucracy has blossomed within higher education institutions, as a symptom of technical rationality, which has contributed to more complicated hierarchies to navigate for administrative leaders.

Higher education bureaucracy is increasingly influenced by accountability measures that are emboldened through technical rationality, which holds ideals of efficiency and effectiveness (Sellman, 2012). According to Richard Smith (1999), "the ascendancy of technicism, of technical or instrumental rationality, is sufficiently marked in education...the assumption that the main values of the education system can be characterized in terms of efficiency and effectiveness" and the growth of accountability measures all indicate a great challenge is faced by philosophers of education who desire a, "richer, more humane and in the end more educational conception of education and...other forms of public service" (p. 327). What is made possible, and what is not made possible, through technical rationality is of vital importance to the decisions that are made within higher education. Feenberg (2010) said that we must, "...explain the social and cultural impact of technical rationality without losing track of its concrete social embodiment in actual devices and systems" (p. 150). One must first become aware of the contours of this form of rationality before one can name it, describe it, and recognize the productive effects it has on ethics, decision-making, and forms of leadership. Furthermore, one must become aware of how technical rationality is reproduced through relations of power,

normalized practices, organization of programs, and processes of operation within higher education institutions.

The official knowledge that is taught and valued within educational institutions has become indicative of technical rationality, and that knowledge serves to extend said rationality (Apple & Aasen, 2003). I think of mistletoe as a metaphor for this relationship between official knowledge and technical rationality. The way that mistletoe is perceived by society relates to the way it has been used, and its historical association predates Christianity and Christmastime. Mistletoe is a plant that attaches itself to other host plants (such as the oak tree in my front yard); once attached, the mistletoe takes nutrients and water while also spreading through the host plant; often, portions of the host plant die, or the whole host plant dies. I would bet that far fewer people know about how mistletoe exists in nature, or know that they may have some real mistletoe in their yard, and far more people simply associate mistletoe with Christmastime kisses. While live mistletoe may still be used as decoration, the only forms of it that I have seen are manufactured plastic versions. So, in this example, official knowledge equates to the accepted use and holiday associations with mistletoe; while the official knowledge becomes accepted, the rationality and practices that have allowed for something to become official knowledge and appear as common sense (e.g. the need to hang plastic mistletoe in a house) is often invisible and pervasive. I am unable to see the mistletoe residing in the oak tree in my yard, that is unless I climb the tree for closer inspection, or I look at the tree once it has shed its leaves for the winter, and it is then that the evergreen leaves of the mistletoe show themselves through the bare branches. So, I suggest that a different kind of awareness and approach to analysis is needed to make visible the rationalities and practices that bolster official knowledge and thereby influence norms that are viewed as common sense.

Social rationality, according to Feenberg (2010), depends on three main principles:

- 1) Exchange of equivalents,
- 2) Classification and application of rules,
- 3) Optimization of effort and calculation of results (p. 159).

Technical rationality relies on these principles to normalize and extend accepted notions of truth and reason. Technical rationality makes it appear that universals can be 1) known, and 2) applied as scientific knowledge in order to find a concrete solution for any problem, regardless of the complex values of a community. The goods that technical rationality promises to produce are objective solutions (through methods)—weighed and measured by experts in advance—for any problem that is encountered by a leader. The acceptance of this arrangement becomes internalized by leaders (and others), as the conditions that must be fulfilled to arrive at said solution become not the concern of the leader but rather the technical expert who, rather invisibly, determines solutions through the utilization of various methods and technologies (Tijmes, 2001). Rather than deliberating over a problem, technical rationality promises to allow a leader to ‘hand off’ a problem for it to be studied through means of quantifiable measures, and once the problem is appropriately ‘sized-up’ through a standardized process a solution can be returned to the leader that will simply require implementation of specified steps.

Technical rationality is supposed to offer techniques of leading and making decisions that can be predetermined before one ever encounters a future problem. With the right outcomes-based training (education), codification of ethics, and the application of appropriate technologies one can produce a solution in a manner that is like cooking a dinner from a pre-arranged and mailed meal kit that arrives at one’s doorstep. Follow the steps that are provided, use the appropriate ingredients, and anyone can arrive at the same outcome—a delicious dinner. This

should highlight the dismissal of the importance of who is cooking the meal—or leading—as well as the judgment they may utilize when cooking said meal, or making a decision. The individual leader is not of importance through this kind of rationality, because they are reduced to a technician who is applying knowledge and skill within a formulaic scenario. Further, through the appearance of convenience in decision-making leaders are ultimately less engaged in the process of making a decision; it could even be argued that the leader is not in fact making any decision at all, but is instead delivering a decision that has been made for them (Tijmes, 2001).

Accountability measures, which are often informed by technical rationality should be problematized for their inability to contribute to “intelligent social action” in the way that *phronesis* can (Flyvbjerg, Landman, & Schram, 2012, p. 1). Yet, these accountability measures are part of the means to ensure that the approved and vetted techniques are used as the means to achieve the ends of producing said solutions when faced with a problem. The solutions, which are predetermined, are products which are viewed as the ends. So, through the reason constructed by technical rationality, ends can be determined without considering the nuance of each individual situation, or the values of each community (Tijmes, 2001). Technical rationality puts ends and means in a static form because it is assumed that what matters is what is produced; therefore, the way in which something is produced is not of importance (Smith, 1999). Through technical rationality, certain outcomes can be sought (e.g. a vision of a greater good), and other consequences can be ignored as being unimportant, inconsequential, or even non-existent. Prioritizing an outcome and having minimal concern with how that outcome is achieved is problematic.

Moral Philosophy of Technical Rationality

Foucault focuses on the analysis of evils and shows restraint in matters of commitment to ideas and systems of thought about what is good for man, given the historical experience that few things have produced more suffering among humans than strong commitments to implementing utopian visions of the good. (Flyvbjerg, 1998, pp. 221-222)

Technical rationality is concerning, not only for its dismissal of context, but also because it is the dominant rationality and is embedded in higher education practices to an extent that its existence and influence is not known; in a sense, it is hidden, because of its wide acceptance as a common-sense approach to administration. Technical rationality falsely simplifies things conceptually, which can make thinking easier but understanding more difficult (Flyvbjerg, 1998). The ethical dilemmas faced by higher education administrators cannot be addressed in an ethically suitable way through technical rationality; for, this form of reasoning focuses on the means by which something can be accomplished rather than considering what goal should be sought in consideration with the possible means that align with said goal (Tijmes, 2001). These ethical blinders are due to the failed promises of the moral philosophy that underpins technical rationality—utilitarianism. The scientific methods and technologies that are used to support utilitarianism, through their supposed predictive capabilities regarding human behavior, have been unable to live up to the challenges of describing the complexity and unpredictability of human existence and social communities (Rosenberg, 2012).

According to utilitarianism, the highest moral principle, “is to maximize happiness, which requires the overall balance of pleasure over pain” (Sandel, 2010, p. 34). The utilitarian moral philosophy recognizes that people like pleasure and dislike pain, and it makes this principle the basis for moral and political life. A principle of utility could be used by higher education leaders when considering the adoption of a policy; leaders could ask, “if we add all of the benefits of this policy, and subtract all of the costs, will it produce more happiness than the

alternative?” (Sandel, 2010, p. 34). Through the language of calculation, production, and alternatives, one can see the way in which utilitarianism is embedded as technical rationality’s ethic of operation.

Utilitarianism requires accurate prediction of consequences related to various policy options (Rosenberg, 2012, pp. 260-261); the utilitarian must assume that various consequences can be predicted accurately, and therefore, the policy option that produces the most happiness and least pain will be the obvious option to choose. The prediction of consequences requires that human behaviors can be predicted through scientific techniques (Rosenberg, 2012, p. 263). Therefore, for utilitarianism to be successful one must assume that the future can be predicted and that all variables can be controlled for across various events—to the extent that the future is altered in favor of a pre-selected outcome. Due to the continual inability to accomplish such forms of predictability in human behavior, the moral philosophy of technical rationality (utilitarianism) should immediately be recognized as a one of the downfalls of technical rationality; for, if behaviors and outcomes cannot be predicted through quantitative scientific techniques, then utilitarianism should be avoided as a moral philosophy for higher education administration. However, despite these false promises and limitations, technical rationality continues to be an accepted and expected rationality; it is a rationality that normalizes the decisions and actions of higher education administrators in ways that have ethical repercussions. The moral philosophy guiding technical rationality—utilitarianism—is, according to Foucault (2008), “a technology of government...,” meaning that utilitarianism is utilized as a means by which the conduct of individuals is controlled (p. 41). To better understand how technical rationality is perpetuated as an accepted regime of truth, one must incorporate a Foucauldian understanding of power relations and governmentality.

Technical Rationality and a Foucauldian Understanding of Power

From the sixteenth and seventeenth century it does not seem that the exercise of power was adjusted in accordance with wisdom, but according to calculation, that is to say, the calculation of force, relations, wealth, and factors of strength. That is to say, one no longer tries to peg government to the truth; one tries to peg government to rationality. It seems to me that we could describe the modern forms of governmental technology as control of government by pegging it to rationality. (Foucault, 2008, p. 311)

Approaching the analysis of a field like education policy from a ‘governmentality’ stance can open up a critical space, a space that centres on...that dimension of our history composed by the intervention, contestation, operationalization and transformation of more or less rationalized schemes, programmes, techniques and devices which seek to shape conduct so as to achieve certain ends. (Rose, 1990 as cited in Doherty, 2007, p. 199)

Foucault’s philosophical work has been utilized to critically interrogate many organizational and institutional settings, including educational settings (Epseland & Sauder, 2007; Sauder & Epseland, 2009; Walker, 2009 as cited in Marion & Gonzales, 2014). According to Foucault (1991), there is a need to examine, “how forms of rationality inscribe themselves in practices or systems of practices, and what role they play within them, because it’s true that ‘practices’ don’t exist without a certain regime of rationality” (p. 79). This examination can extend to the dominant form of rationality in higher education, technical rationality, whose influence is recognizable in the practices and policies of higher education institutions. A regime of technical rationality is related to existing power relations, for the rationality helps to align or normalize individuals’ thoughts regarding what is the ‘common-sense’ approach in each situation. For example, the acceptable and normalized way in which one may administrate and lead as a Senior Student Affairs Officer is informed by rationalities that make certain practices, policies, and processes appear as ‘common-sense’. The rationality is evident in the practices of institutions, professional associations, graduate preparation programs, etc. Therefore, becoming aware of the existence of technical rationality, as well as how it is inscribed in practice, is key for

an administrator who wishes to act in any way that is different than the ‘common-sense’ status quo.

Becoming aware of how a rationality is inscribed in practice requires that one is able to study and analyze a rationality by first making it visible for analysis. Foucault (1991) explains in detail what he means by examining a regime of rationality:

Rather than measuring this regime against a value-of-reason, I would prefer to analyze it according to two axes: on the one hand, that of codification/prescription (how it forms an ensemble of rules, procedures, mean to an end, etc.), and on the other, that of true or false formulation (how it determines a domain of objects about which it is possible to articulate true or false propositions)...To put the matter clearly: my problem is to see how men govern (themselves and others) by the production of truth (I repeat once again that by production of truth I mean not the production of true utterances, but the establishment of domains in which the practice of true and false can be made at once ordered and pertinent). (p. 79)

In other words, a Foucauldian understanding of a regime of technical rationality would seek to analyze how the rationality is codified and prescribed (e.g. professional associations’ codes of ethics and institutional/divisional missions) and how certain things become common sense to a body of people in their appearance regarding binary choices of right/wrong or true/false (e.g. a good division of student affairs must have predetermined learning outcomes that are quantifiable and can be universally assessed across various programs and departments). Foucault (1991) is interested in studying the “play and development of a set of diverse realities”; these realities are developed and maintained through particular rationalities (p. 80). Therefore, Foucault is interested in studying how these realities come to be, as well as how they are maintained; laws and policies provide coercive power to guide behavior (e.g. Title IX and an institution’s sexual misconduct policy), accountability measures are meant to align with such laws and policies (e.g. annual Title IX compliance trainings to be completed by responsible staff members), technologies of surveillance normalize behavior of individuals (e.g. diversity training outcomes

are built into annual employee evaluations), statistical measures construct populations (e.g. institutions begin to ask for gender identity and sexual orientation on surveys in order to construct the populations that relate to Title IX interpretations), and individuals' behaviors conform to the normalized rationalities (e.g. each individual member of a higher education community should be respected, regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation, in a manner that grants them the freedom to operate to the full extent of their capacities as a contributing member of the community) (Foucault, 1991). The argument is not that these practices that are normalized through a rationality are good or bad, it is rather that one should recognize how these practices and processes become normalized and accepted.

The development of realities then, "act as grids for the perception and evaluation of things" (Foucault, 1991, p. 80). Further, according to Foucault (2008), "...governmentality...is no more than a proposed analytical grid for," relations of power (p. 186). This Foucauldian understanding analyzes how accepted realities develop and are maintained; however, this analysis does not evaluate the realities of a rationality as being good or bad. Title IX is an example of Foucault's idea that freedom must be produced by the government, as that is the very thing that Title IX, and the practices that are influenced by it, strive to produce: freedom of the individual. However, Foucault (2008) would also point out that the act of producing freedom also, "entails the establishment of limitations, controls, forms of coercion, and obligations relying on threats, etcetera" (p. 64). The freedom of the individual must exist to optimize production by the individual within the community, but the individual's freedom can also only exist to the extent that is deemed acceptable by the dominant rationality, and it must not reduce the total freedom (read as productive abilities) of others in the community. Therefore, freedom of the individual is produced, controlled, and directed through relations of power.

Foucault's conception of power should not be understood as physical force or violence that acts upon individuals in order to control them; instead, power is understood as that which is addressed to individuals who have freedom in their actions. According to Gordon (1991), "power is defined as 'actions on others' actions': that is, it presupposes rather than annuls their capacity as agents; it acts upon, and through, an open set of practical and ethical possibilities" (p. 5). Power is understood as framing both knowledge and action (Pratt, 2011). So, power influences and guides the choices in action of individuals. Due to the understanding of power as not existing in a few centers, but as flowing through power networks, new possibilities in strategic action exist for those who are able to analyze these relations of power and the often oppressive productive effects of such relations. Analyzing the 'how' of power relations is of primary interest for those who wish to disrupt normalized and accepted rationalities.

A Foucauldian understanding of power is important to incorporate when attempting to explore how the practices that support and are supported by technical rationality are normalized and thereby become effectively invisible. According to Gordon (1991), Foucault was, "interested in government as an activity or practice, and in arts of government as ways of knowing what that activity consisted in, and how it might be carried on" (p. 3). Foucault used the terms *rationality of government* and *art of government* to mean roughly the same thing; a rationality of government is meant to describe how the practices of government are thought of, and to describe this system of thinking. This rationality of government includes conceptions of what the act of governing means, who is permitted to carry out the acts of governing, as well as who or what is to be governed (Gordon, 1991, p. 3). Therefore, Foucault (2008) viewed economics as analyzing activity rather than a process, and the analyzed activity is, "the internal rationality, the strategic programming of individual's activity" (p. 223).

The rationality of government can be referenced to identify how certain practices appear as common sense. Foucault defined government as meaning, *the conduct of conduct*. This definition is meant to describe, “a form of activity aiming to shape, guide or affect the conduct of some person or persons” (Gordon, 1991, p. 2). Foucault described the practice of government in Western societies as seeking to normalize acceptable behaviors and rationalities through governmentality; this normalization, according to Foucault, is achieved through techniques of power that observe, monitor, shape, and control the behavior of individuals as they interact with various institutions (e.g. schools, prisons, employers, etc.) (Gordon, 1991). Foucault theorized that as our societies have grown in size and complexity our major institutions—such as universities—have served to normalize acceptable behaviors, thoughts, and ways of being (Marion & Gonzales, 2014). According to Foucault’s philosophy of the normalization of behaviors, our society employs methods to facilitate people’s social learning, through the use of “disciplinary technologies” (Wain, 2007, p. 163). It is through these disciplinary technologies that individuals begin to view themselves as individuals, and thereby view themselves as being responsible for their behaviors, as well as being responsible to society.

Foucault analyzes power as being dispersed through, “a series of discontinuous networks,” rather than being, “concentrated in a few centers” (Major-Poetzl, 1983, p. 47). So, rather than analyzing power as being held by a few individuals, power is analyzed as flowing through a complex network of relations. This analysis of power makes it more difficult to conceive of the effects of power, than if one is to analyze power as residing in a single individual that holds a hierarchical position. One must therefore focus on the process of power and the practices of power. This analysis of power makes possible new understandings of how one can attempt to counter the repressive effects of discontinuous networks. One of the ways in which

these discontinuous networks are reinforced and normalized is through the relations and rationality that are practiced within educational institutions. As individuals participate in schools, acceptable behaviors, rationalities, and ethics are normalized. Howley and Hartnett (1992) specifically analyzed the ways in which certain forms of knowledge serve as technologies of power within universities. Techniques of power include—but are certainly not limited to—the following: annual performance reviews of employees, the assignment of grades to indicate a student’s performance, college entrance exams, comprehensive exams in graduate school, and annual assessment plans by departments that include required performance indicators. Each of the examples provided of technologies of power also serve as examples of measures of performance, and thereby contribute to the ideal of production that is a normalized reality presented through technical rationality.

Technologies of power utilized by universities allow for surveillance of the individual, and self-surveillance is also normalized by the individual. This means that after a while, the individual must not actually be surveilled through methods of measurement, categorization, and codified ethics (e.g. grades, academic major classification, student codes of conduct); rather, individuals begin to self-surveil their own behaviors, rationality, and ethics in a manner that aligns with acceptable standardized behaviors. Each of these moves also contributes toward making the individual a subject; individuals are made by being “subject to someone else by control and dependence” and by being “tied to (one’s) own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge” (Veyne, 1997 as cited in O’Leary, 2002, p. 109). So, an individual’s behaviors and rationality are normalized through becoming a subject. One way in which one is constructed as a subject is through the use of technologies of comparison of the individual to a population (made possible through methods of quantitative measurement, such as statistics). Through such

technologies of power one is not only categorized by others, one also begins to adopt the rationality that allows such methods of categorization to appear not only as common-sense methods to employ, but also the only methods that can make claims to truth. As Foucault (2008) said, “this it seems to me, is what characterizes liberal rationality: how to model government, the art of government, how to [found] the principle of rationalization of the art of government on the rational behavior of those who are governed” (p. 312). I understand Senior Student Affairs Officers as individuals who not only are governed, but also govern others; technologies of power not only act upon SSAOs, they are also unavoidably utilized by SSAOs. The rationality that is normalized for Senior Student Affairs Officers, and the relations of power of which they are a part must be considered if one wishes to explore the processes and practices of governing for these higher education leaders, as well as to consider a different understanding of ethical leadership in practice.

A Political Response to Power and Regimes of Rationality

We should not waste our time searching in vain for universals. Where universals are said to exist, or where people tacitly assume they exist, universals must be questioned, according to Foucault. For Foucault, our history endows us with the possibility to become aware of those social arrangements which create problems, for instance empowering civil society. It follows that we have the possibility to either oppose or promote these arrangements. This is Foucault’s point of departure for social and political change, not global moral norms. (Flyvbjerg, 1998, p. 222)

At the micro level of implementation of arrangements, of techniques, all kinds of practices (administrative, bureaucratic, monitoring, auditing, training, performance managing) are enacted. Discourses, rationales and forms of knowledge support these socially mediated arrangements...Remembering Foucault’s conception that power is flexible, exercised, rather than possessed, productive as well as repressive, a governmentality reading has an insatiable concern for the resistance, subversion, penetration, failures and conflicts of operationalized policy. (Doherty, 2007, p. 201)

Foucault’s theories regarding governmentality, power relations, and techniques of power have been critiqued for failing to focus on global politics, or adequately analyzing the relations

between the state and society; Foucault acknowledged this critique, and addressed this decision as intentional: “in the sense that one abstains from an indigestible meal” (Gordon, 1991, p. 4). Foucault argued that the state has no universal properties, essentially no singular essence, and therefore an attempt to reduce it to such universals would result in a faulty analysis; instead of these false notions of the state having universal properties that guide those governing, Foucault viewed the state’s nature as a function of governmental practices, and any changes in these practices would thereby influence the perceived changes in the nature of the state (Gordon, 1991). In this sense, it is clear that Foucault is pushing back against a rationality that favors universals—which is the very thing that technical rationality requires to make claims of truth. Instead of a rationality that relies on universals, Foucault seeks an awareness/valuing of socio-historical context.

With a lack of focus on practices, many theoretical approaches will fail to contribute to an awareness of socio-historical context. Gordon’s (1991) critique of political theory is that it, “attends too much to institutions, and too little to practices” (p. 4). This focus on institutions, through political theory, can limit one’s understanding of the relations of power which can be traced through particular practices. One’s approach to analysis of power must therefore focus on micro questions of how processes operate through a system of practices and behaviors. Flyvbjerg (1998) interpreted Foucault’s critique of unachievable ideals as, “not even entire institutional systems can ensure freedom, even though they are established with that purpose” (p. 222). So, one must shed a utopian view of freedom or lack of oppression for all, through a Foucauldian understanding of power. Flyvbjerg (1998) sees value in the emphasis that Foucault places on the dynamics of power, for, “understanding how power works is the first prerequisite for action, because action is the exercise of power” (p. 228). This Foucauldian approach to analyzing the

techniques and relations of power necessitates a focus on the concrete, within a specific context. Yet, a danger is that while focusing on the particular and local, one may overlook generalized conditions that are concerned with institutions, constitutions, and structural issues (Flyvbjerg, 1998). While institutions may appear to be neutral and independent, Foucault says the political task is to criticize these institutions, “in such a manner that the political violence which has always exercised itself obscurely through them will be unmasked, so that one can fight them (Chomsky and Foucault 1974: 171)” (Flyvbjerg, 1998, p. 223).

In response to power, Foucault, “stresses substantive micro politics” (Flyvbjerg, 1998, p. 224). The specifics of these micro politics must be determined by the participant in action, for it would be reductionary for Foucault to attempt to provide an outline or a prescriptive approach for such action. Foucault would not prescribe the process or outcome for actions; instead he would recommend that individuals focus on conflict and relations of power, “as the most effective point of departure for the fight against domination” (Flyvbjerg, 1998, p. 224). This fight, according to Flyvbjerg (1998), is, “central to civil society both internally, i.e., in the relationship between different groups within civil society...and externally, in the relationship of civil society to the spheres of government and business where the fight against domination can be said to be constitutive of civil society” (p. 224). The question that is often asked in relation to questions of domination of others or perceived injustices is, ‘what can I do about it?’ The desire to take action should not lead one to accept a universal prescription; such a false solution could be found through technical rationality. Foucault would think that this desire to find such a prescription is part of the problem itself, because of what it makes possible and what it makes impossible (Flyvbjerg, 1998). Yet, according to Levy (2006), “Foucault tells us, that where the codes are numerous detailed, ‘practices of the self [...] almost fade away’. But finding an

adequate place for liberty in ethics requires that the practices of the self remain vital” (p.22). This is a key point for higher education leaders to take note of in relation to the development of codes of ethics that verge on prescribing action, policies that function as decision-making grids, and quantitative assessment plans that determine how one provides learning opportunities for students.

Foucault has often been critiqued as being non-action oriented, because of his critique of prescriptive solutions. Foucault responded to this critique:

It’s true that certain people, such as those who work in the institutional setting of the prison...are not likely to find advice or instructions in my books to them about ‘what is to be done.’ But my project is precisely to bring it about that they ‘no longer know what to do,’ so that the acts, gestures, discourses that up until then had seemed to go without saying become problematic, difficult, dangerous (Miller 1993: 235). (Flyvbjerg, 1998, p. 224)

Foucault focuses his efforts, according to Flyvbjerg (1998), on, “the local and context-dependent and toward the analysis of strategies and tactics as basis for power and struggle” (p. 227). One should take from this that quick or easy answers are likely such in name alone. A different reality must be considered to not seek such false solutions. An embrace of struggle with conflict and a messy understanding of power relations is key for higher education leaders when addressing problems through a Foucauldian conception of political engagement. Foucault’s understanding of regimes of rationality, governmentality, power relations, as well as how one should not look for prescriptions for action, not only aligns with Aristotle’s understanding of *episteme*, *techne*, and *phronesis*—I argue that Foucault’s analysis of power is a necessary component of *phronetic* leadership in modern institutions of higher education.

Phronesis

Despite more than two thousand years of attempts by rationalistic philosophers, no one has been able so far to live up to Plato’s injunction that to avoid relativism our thinking must be rationally and universally grounded. (Flyvbjerg, 1998, p. 220)

Bent Flyvbjerg has written extensively regarding the concepts of *phronesis*, *episteme*, and *techne*, as well as how each is commonly incorporated (or not) in our contemporary world. Flyvbjerg draws from Aristotle's conceptions of *phronesis*, *episteme*, and *techne*, in order to address what he sees as limitations of other approaches to social science, taking the stance that social science must deal with social, technological, and epistemological complexities. According to Flyvbjerg's (2004) interpretation of Aristotle, "*phronesis* concerns values and goes beyond analytical, scientific knowledge (*episteme*) and technical knowledge or know how (*techne*) (pp. 284-285). The focus on the importance of the virtuous social actor developing their virtue of character and virtue of intellect—through engaged practice—has shifted to a focus on the development of codified ethics (Levy, 2006). Codified ethics are intended to prescribe what someone should do in any given situation; yet, context cannot be accounted for by codes, for as soon as they are written the context of any scenario has inevitably shifted in an unforeseen manner. For example, while a doctor can provide a general recommendation of practices (i.e. eat healthy, exercise regularly, etc.) that are likely to help an individual patient live a healthy life over the course of a year, that doctor's recommended plan of practices for the year cannot account for unknowns, such as the patient tripping off the curb and breaking their ankle. That codified plan of health is therefore insufficient when new particulars must be considered and the health practices must then be adjusted for the patient. It would be foolish for the patient to follow the codified plan of exercise while they are healing from a broken ankle. So too is it foolish to seek to codify ethics for every eventuality, and it is impossible to account for all contextual considerations.

Phronesis is about making value judgments in specific situations (Flyvbjerg, 2004). Judgments are made with the simultaneous consideration of means and ends, as people will be

impacted by a judgment. The apparent lack of our current collective value (or recognition) of *phronesis* should concern us, as Aristotle believed that *phronesis* is in fact an intellectual virtue that is, “a necessary condition of successful social organization, and (is) its most important prerequisite” (Flyvbjerg, 2004, p. 285). As our social organizations become more complex and influenced by relations of power, it would seem that *phronesis* is necessary for one to navigate these complexities in a manner that is not reduced to technical rationality. The moral philosophy of *phronesis* is one that brings a contextually situated ethic of care and subjectivity that cannot be matched by naturalistic or interpretive approaches to social science. Consider a metaphor of the destructive and erasing effects of technical rationality as clear-cutting and grading the land for a neighborhood master-plan that is developed and implemented before homeowners are even finalized; instead, *phronesis* allows for the nuanced and careful planning of a neighborhood that is built house by house, with a consideration for the particular owners that will live in each house, as well as the precise removal of select flora on each lot. While the outcomes may appear similar (e.g. a neighborhood is planned and built), the ‘how’ and ‘why’ that inform the approaches are vastly different.

A dangerous rationality can be constructed if intellectual power is granted to *episteme* and *techne*, which cannot consider the value-based judgments that *phronesis* can. Therefore, *phronesis* is sought through reflection about ethics, morals, experiences, knowledge, and power. This practice of reflection allows one to attempt to become aware of what one knows and what one can do; also, one’s knowledge and ability to act is temporal, and therefore will shift at some unknowable point in the future (Sellman, 2012). The moral philosophy of *phronesis* interrogates and problematizes the assumptions of other forms of reason, and *phronesis* sheds light on the impossible ideal of objective progress in knowledge and predictive outcomes. When compared to

technical rationality, *phronesis* offers a different understanding of what may be possible in action and how values should be considered when making decisions:

By contrast to the Greek conception, technological rationality reduces everything to a single dimension. The higher world of essences collapses into everyday existence...Democracy, for example, is defined by the existing institutions and is not held up as an ideal against which to measure them in view of improving them. (Feenberg, 2010, p. 198)

Experience is a vital component of *phronesis*, as experience provides situated understanding to inform one's moral actions. In traditional societies there was not a great separation between the realms of knowledge and experience, however, in our present moment knowledge and experience are separated through the means of specialization and differentiation (Feenberg, 2010). This can be considered in relation to how practitioners and scholars are often thought of as distinctly separate and specialized in professional fields.

According to Dunne (1993), "if we want to find a synthetic unity beyond the negations of the dialectic of knowledge and virtue, then it is to the notion of experience that we should turn" (p. 280). Dunne (1993) admits that, "Aristotle himself did not take pains to relate explicitly either *phronesis* or virtue to experience, but he has, I believe, left us the material that permit us to do so in his name" (p. 281). With the importance placed on experience, it may come as no surprise that there is a practicality associated with *phronesis*. *Phronesis* is often translated to mean practical wisdom; however, unlike *episteme* and *techne*, *phronesis* cannot be found in a modern word. Perhaps, as Flyvbjerg (2004) argues, this absence of a contemporary linguistic representation of *phronesis* is, "indicative of the degree to which scientific and instrumental rationality dominate modern thinking and language" (p. 285). This scientific rationality points to the historical influence of what constitutes 'good' or 'strong' social science.

The relationship of experience and *phronesis* is cyclical (i.e. experience informs moral

practice and vice versa), and this relationship cannot be viewed through a cause and effect or interpretive lens; an understanding of this nature would lead to a false and reductionary understanding of *phronesis*. Dunne (1993) supports an ever unsteady (non-enlightened state) understanding of *phronesis*: “Phronesis is what enables experience to be self-correcting and to avoid settling into mere routine. If experience is an accumulated capital, we might say, then phronesis is this capital wisely invested” (p. 292). *Phronesis* should not be understood as a stagnant or universal state that one can reach through employing prescriptive methods of action that are withdrawn from context; this understanding would be both counter to Aristotle and Foucault’s understandings. *Phronesis* is a personal journey of the *phronetic* leader, with no predetermined destination or final ending; much like a dynamic process, my interpretation of *phronetic* leadership is that it is always changing and transforming in relation to the leader’s character dispositions, community context, and wisdom developed through experience. Dunne (1993) describes the dynamic nature of *phronesis*: “the insights it achieves are turned back into experience, which is in this way constantly reconstructed or enriched. And the more lived experience is reconstructed in this way, the more sensitive and insightful phronesis becomes—or, rather, the more the experiencer becomes a phronimos.” (p. 293). In this way, *phronetic* social science offers an alternative to the ideal of predictive science (*episteme*), “that promises greater social and technical control of the world (*techne*)” (Griggs & Howarth, 2012, p. 169). Flyvbjerg’s interpretation of *phronesis*, “brings together the concepts of power and value so as to provide a meaningful alternative to (naturalist) and (interpretive) models of social science” (Griggs & Howarth, 2012, p. 169). Therefore, *phronesis* offers alternative ways to lead within communities of higher education practice. *Phronesis* is not a static being, but a process that enables dynamic ethics in actions that are responsive to one’s community of service.

Moral Philosophy of *Phronesis*

“The character of an agent is the basis from which moral decisions proceed and, for this reason alone, it seems an oversight to attempt to eliminate the significance of character from moral theory and ethical evaluation.” (Allard-Nelson, 2004, pp. 96-97)

Our forms of life, specifically our practices of praising and blaming, lead us to internalize certain character traits as exemplary. Thus, virtue ethics claims that moral judgments owe their force ultimately to the assessments we make, that certain actions, omissions and dispositions express certain traits of character, traits that are virtuous or vicious. It is this fact that accounts for the primacy of the interest one ought to take in the shape of one’s life. Our concern to live a certain kind of life, a concern which, given that we are fundamentally social beings, we cannot not have, provides the ground for our morality. Ethics, defined as the relation of the self to itself, precedes morality, understood as the relation to the other. (Levy, 2006, p. 28)

The moral philosophy of *phronesis* is informed by the work of Aristotle and Foucault, and it is based in virtue ethics. The foundation of Aristotle’s virtue ethics is in the concept of *eudaimonia*, or, “the success that a human being secures through his or her own actions and choices” (Vella, 2008, p. 116). *Eudaimonia* is a concept that can be understood as happiness or flourishing; Aristotle thought that *eudaimonia* could be achieved through the cultivation of virtues of character, rather than following codified ethical rules. However, while every individual may aim for *eudaimonia*, it is, “only those persons who are habituated to excellence, and who choose and act in accordance with excellence,” who will achieve flourishing (Allard-Nelson, 2004, p. 99). Aristotle’s ideas do not focus on creating perfect citizens, rather he focuses on creating the best possible citizens, which he understood is not to be achieved through, “strict adherence to canonical rules without, first and foremost, habituating moral agents, from earliest childhood, to the rules themselves, the values that they represent, and, most importantly, the skills necessary to abide by them” (Allard-Nelson, 2004, p. 114).

An individual must cultivate the virtues of character, such as courage, within themselves, while also developing the intellectual virtue of practical wisdom (*phronesis*) (Vella, 2008). One’s

virtues of character must be developed over time, and practiced through virtuous acts. It is through this habituation of acting virtuously that one hones and refines the virtuous character that is deemed desirable according to the norms and values of a community. Thus, virtues of character are developed over time, and it is required that the right experiences, resources, setting, and mentorship are in place to develop these virtues of character (Allard-Nelson, 2004). Therefore, virtues of character cannot be acquired through learning about them in a vacuum that is removed from any context and struggle in acting virtuously. They must be refined, challenged, and tested through actively engaging in one's community, and by practicing actions in a way that strives for the most virtuous form of action that is possible:

From the point of view of cultivating virtue, the claim is that learning virtue is more than learning balanced deliberation, more than learning how to make certain general ends, such as peace and welfare, one's target. In addition, it is learning to value the actions which realize these ends, and the sort of person who reliably performs them. This, it is Aristotle's claim, cannot be learned apart from actual practice in virtuous action. (Sherman, 1989, p. 176)

It is with this understanding of the importance of the development of one's virtuous character that it also becomes clear the important role that mentorship plays in helping an individual to reflect on their past actions and explore how they can adjust their actions to be more virtuous when faced with a similar need to act in the future. Being able to learn with and from mentors, who are themselves virtuous actors, allows an individual to refine their own virtues of character and develop practical wisdom. Each individual will have different dispositions (i.e., will lean towards anger more quickly), and so each individual should focus on reflection of past actions so as to seek the appropriate mean of each virtue for particular situations. Some situations will necessitate a greater extent of a particular character virtue, and yet still other situations may necessitate no immediate action, or an action that is delayed for the future (Sherman, 1989).

Sherman (1989) discusses this mean to be sought, through practical wisdom, for virtues of character:

I want to argue, nevertheless, that as a general methodological point about the tailoring of action to particular circumstances, the doctrine of the mean can have practical force, and can lead to more individualized strategies for accurately grasping what is relevant in a case... The general notion is that determining the mean will presuppose critical and self reflective ways for accurately reading the ethically relevant features of the case. Ethical perception requires... methods by which we can correct and expand our point of view. (p. 35)

It is through living a life of reflective action that is focused on cultivating virtues of character, and the intellectual virtue of *phronesis*, that one can attempt to live ethically—through one's actions. Aristotle's conceptual development of *phronesis* requires virtuous character of the *phronimos* (practically wise person), in order for there to be socially wise practice. Dunne (1993) details this requirement of virtuous character, when he writes that it requires, "not just knowledge that directs ethical action, but knowledge that must itself be constantly protected and maintained by good character." (p. 277). Thus, one's intellectual virtue (practical wisdom) and virtues of character (courage, justice, generosity, etc.) must work in tandem; when these are married together one can place ends and means in conversation in a way that blends these into one consideration rather than dangerously distinct categories. Perhaps an appropriate metaphor is to consider a single-speed bicycle: the virtues of character constitute the chain, and the intellectual virtues, primarily practical wisdom constitute the pedals. The rate at which the pedals are turned, as well as the direction (forward or backward) determines how and when the chain is engaged or disengaged in order to produce movement or slow movement, which is determined according to considerations of safety, speed, upcoming obstacles, etc. Aristotle's ethics focus primarily on an individual's character rather than their actions; the actions of an individual are of importance as it relates to the virtuous character those actions produce (Vella, 2008). Further,

“...the good end is not evident except to the good (person), and it is not possible for a (person) to be *phronimos* if (they are) not a good (person) and it is not possible to be a good (person) without *Phronesis*” (Michelakis, 1961, p. 60).

This focus on the character of the individual draws a clear distinction between the moral philosophy of utilitarianism that judges whether a person’s actions are morally permissible according to an attempted standardized rule; the character of the actor would not serve as primary importance, according to the moral philosophy of utilitarianism; instead, the person’s actions would be judged as being morally permissible or not, in so far as they abided by moral rules based in duties and obligations to others (Vella, 2008). This is an important distinction to note between the virtue ethics of Aristotle/Foucault and utilitarianism.

Frank (2012) argues that Bourdieu and Foucault describe “the human condition as being dependent on *phronesis*,” and that reading the work of both philosophers enhances one’s *phronetic* capacities (p. 48). Frank (2012) summarizes Bourdieu’s main contribution to Flyvbjerg’s conception of the capacities of a *phronetic* social scientist; they must have, “sufficient reflective control over which stakes are taken seriously for what purposes. The game for which the scholastic must develop a feel involves this movement between fields, becoming caught up in one field’s stakes and then suspending engagement” (p. 57). Frank’s (2012) interpretation of Michel Foucault’s version of *phronesis* makes a valuable contribution to understanding the moral philosophy of *phronesis*. Foucault views every potential action as being dangerous, and he critiques the idea that ‘solutions’ or ‘alternatives’ “offer the seductive possibility of delegating such choices to some ethical algorithm for choosing some truth” (Frank, 2012, p. 61). The referencing of an ethical algorithm that can select the best choice is a false and dangerous ideal; yet, it continues to be sought out through naturalistic and interpretive

approaches to social science. Foucault avoids the slippery slope of relativism and foundationalism by rejecting both and replacing them with situational ethics (Flyvbjerg, 1998).

Foucault saw any form of government as being inherently capable of dominating individuals, due to the purpose of government as normalizing behaviors. So, Foucault thought that, “any form of government – liberal or totalitarian – must be subjected to analysis and critique based on a will not to be dominated, voicing concerns in public and withholding consent about anything that appears to be unacceptable” (Flyvbjerg, 1998, p. 221). Foucault’s norms “are expressed in a desire to challenge ‘every abuse of power, whoever the victims’ and in this way ‘to give new impetus, as far and wide as possible, to the undefined work of freedom’” (Foucault, 1984 as cited in Flyvbjerg, 1998, p. 221). A grounding of Foucault’s norms outside of historical and personal context would be a dangerous move, as it would require, “an ethical uniformity with the kind of utopian-totalitarian implications that Foucault would warn against in any context” (Flyvbjerg, 1998, p. 221). Foucault makes it clear that he thinks that any attempt to universally codify ethics is dangerous and should not be sought: “The search for a form of morality acceptable by everyone in the sense that everyone should submit to it, seems catastrophic to me (Foucault, 1984 as quoted in Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1986 and cited in Flyvbjerg, 1998, p. 221). Instead of universals, Foucault would suggest we seek to understand our context:

For Foucault, the socially and historically conditioned context, and not fictive universals, constitutes the most effective bulwark against relativism and nihilism, and the best basis for action. Our sociality and history, according to Foucault, is the only foundation we have, the only solid ground under our feet. And this socio-historical foundation is fully adequate. (Flyvbjerg, 1998, p. 222)

Key to Foucault’s ethics is a care for the self as a primary focus, and this care for the self is, “*simultaneously* a caring for others, for there is an intimate relation between the achievement

of the desired relation to the self and other-directed actions” (Levy, 2006, p. 29). Further, according to Foucault, the oppression of others is not due to an excessive concern for the self, rather it comes from a lack of concern for the self: “the risk of dominating others and exercising over them a tyrannical power only comes from the fact that one did not care for one’s self and that one has become a slave to his desires (ECS: 8)” (Levy, 2006, p. 29).

According to Flyvbjerg (1998), Foucault is oriented toward *phronesis*, because, “for Foucault *praxis* and freedom are derived not from universals or theories. Freedom *is* a practice, and its ideal is not a utopian absence of power. Resistance and struggle, in contrast to consensus, is for Foucault the most solid basis for the practice of freedom” (p. 223). So, there is practical acceptance by Foucault of power. The ethical move is not to strive to remove, or erase, power; instead, one must analyze techniques and relations of power, the productive effects of these techniques and relations of power, and then embrace the struggle of challenging the productive effects that maintain oppression (Major-Poetzl, 1983). Through attempting to understand one’s socially and historically conditioned context one can further develop practical wisdom.

Phronesis offers a response to technical rationality, and *phronesis* was in fact historically prior to the primacy of technical rationality. While the potential of *phronesis* has largely been devalued and forgotten, with the rise of technical rationality, I propose that what I call *phronetic* leadership is an ideal for higher education leaders—specifically Senior Student Affairs Officers.

Senior Student Affairs Officer (SSAO)

Our overwhelming valuation of rational empiricism—a conception of truth as objective and external—and knowledge as a commodity de-legitimizes active public discussions of purpose and meaning, authenticity and identity, or spirituality and spiritual growth. Meaningful dialogue around these topics requires communities of trust and candor in which participants can expose their vulnerabilities as they search, knowing that they will be heard and supported. Limited self-understanding and self-reflection—as well as fears about being left vulnerable in the current competitive and individualistic environment—leave us mired in conflicting impulses and ambivalent about appropriate actions. (Chickering, 2003, p. 44)

My intent is to not draw a distinction between what constitutes a scholar/researcher and what constitutes a practitioner/administrator. This contemporary, and I argue, dangerous distinction or understanding/development of these categories as existing as separate and specialized roles is indicative of a technical rationality that limits the possibility for *phronesis* within student affairs. Aristotle would not have drawn such a distinction, as to attempt to do so would run counter to a foundational understanding of *phronesis*. This is an important point to note, as this distinction is often made when student affairs work is discussed as needing to be informed by both practice and theory (i.e., the researchers/scholars give an administrator the architectural plans of theory, by way of literature, and the administrator then builds and maintains the college student life community according to said plans). This distinction between a researcher/scholar and a practitioner/administrator is misleading; ultimately, it represents the kind of rationality that does not recognize the need for *phronesis*, and this rationality also invalidates (incorrectly) *phronesis*. In order to become a *phronimos*, I argue that one must have a Foucauldian understanding of power, as it is impossible to know what is practicably achievable in action without the ability to analyze power in this way.

Senior Student Affairs Officers (SSAOs) cannot avoid participating in relations of power, or the utilization of disciplining technologies of power as administrators. Even if SSAOs become

aware of the fact that their actions have endless consequences, this will ultimately not keep their actions from reproducing relations of power in normalized ways (Jackson & Mazzei, 2011).

Therefore, I argue that SSAOs must come to terms with this reality, and in the process shed any naivety surrounding an interpretive ideal of achieving a utopian outcome through every action.

However, SSAOs must not let this self-awareness lead to apathy; instead, Foucault would suggest, they must participate in, “a hyper- and pessimistic activity” that contributes toward a more just and wise practice (Frank, 2012, p. 61).

According to Tierney (2012), “the rise of administration and bureaucracy is a hallmark of American higher education in the twentieth century” (p. 8). Further, due to increasing external demands on accountability,

State and federal governments now require institutions to collect data on any number of topics; the most hot-button topic pertains to undergraduate students. Retention, graduation rates, time to degree, job placement, and a host of other topics are now demanded of institutions. (Tierney, 2012, p. 9)

SSAOs often find themselves at the center of these and other hot button topics. These are complex problems that do not allow for universal outcomes, and SSAOs are faced with navigating their actions in a manner that abides by accountability measures, while still serving students. Hyman, Beeler, and Benedict (1994) highlight the increasing call for institutions to develop assessment measures that are designed to hold higher education institutions accountable for the quality education of students. The growth of institutions participating in assessment has contributed to a normalizing of approaches to measuring educational outcomes and student success. The work of student affairs professionals has increasingly been assessed for its alignment with measureable educational outcomes.

The way in which student affairs professionals come to know what is true is of vital importance as it relates to their ethos; this conceptual understanding of the consequences of one's epistemology is evident in Parker Palmer's discussion of an educational agenda:

Objective, analytic, experimental. Very quickly this seemingly bloodless epistemology becomes an ethic. It is an ethic of competitive individualism, in the midst of a world fragmented and made exploitable by the very mode of knowing. The mode of knowing itself breeds intellectual habits, indeed spiritual instincts, that destroy community. We make objects of each other, and the world to be manipulated for our own private ends. (Chickering, 2003, p. 41)

I argue that inexperienced student affairs professional are especially at risk of developing an ethos that is informed by technical rationality, as, according to Dalton (2002), inexperienced student affairs professionals tend to rely on their intellectual knowledge when they are faced with a problem situation; these inexperienced student affairs professionals have not yet had the experiences that have given them the opportunity to recognize the nuances of what may appear as similar situations to them (p. 6). The ability to recognize such nuances may come through practical experience, which can be gained over years of work. SSAOs often have far more practical experience than new student affairs professionals, as SSAOs often have a decade or more of practical experience in student affairs before they are hired as an SSAO. It is through these experiences that SSAOs have the opportunity to learn about the various challenges one may encounter through such a senior level administrative position. Challenges inherent in the SSAO position can range according to the roles that often must be simultaneously fulfilled by one individual. Roles fulfilled by the SSAO can include: "disciplinarian; advocate, mentor, and friend; educator and resource; mediator; initiator, and change agent" (Gaston-Gayles, Wolf-Wendel, Tuttle, Twombly, & Ward, 2005, p. 268). With the simultaneous fulfillment of various roles, the exposure to multiple and complex relations of power, as well as the need to utilize different skills and knowledge, is a reality.

Senior Student Affairs Officers,

Must be able to respond to the needs and demands of several different, sometimes conflicting, constituencies. They must be able to assess the environment, identify problems, and propose and implement solutions, taking into account the mission and values of the institution and the goals of its president. (Estanek, 1999, p. 278)

Barone (2014), writes about the many obstacles that Senior Student Affairs Officers face, including, “funding, curricular hegemony, pedagogical conservatism, and centuries of oppression” (p. 207). However, Barone (2014) also argues that SSAOs are primed to initiate socially just change, due to the responsibilities inherent to their positions (i.e. typically overseeing critical functional areas that impact all students). The ethic of care for students, empathy, and viewing student advocacy as a priority, are at least rhetorically supported as characteristics that SSAOs develop as they work in the field; yet, these may run counter to the additional focus on managerial efficiency, effectiveness, policy development, and interaction with extra-institutional publics (Bloland, 1979). In fact, the SSAO who maintains an ethic of social justice through student advocacy is often, “viewed with suspicion and concern by fellow administrators who find this behavior threatening and who proceed to isolate [them] from the real decision” (McConnell, 1970 as cited in Bloland, 1979, p. 58). This social justice ethic may be viewed as a disruption of the status quo of power relations by others.

Due, at least in part to the inherent conflict of an ethic that attempts to make decisions that are informed by notions of equity and care, and not just based on efficiency and effectiveness, SSAOs may find that a *phronetic* approach to decision making is inherently contrary to the technical rationality of higher education institutions; this can lead to political conflicts that may threaten one’s job security as an SSAO. In fact, the risk on one’s job security, when making decisions as a SSAO, was directly addressed in the following quote: “the riskiness of the [SSAO] position is magnified by the visibility and controversy inherent in it, possibly

exceeded only by that of the [institution's] president" (Smith & Hughey, 2006 as cited in Kuk, King, & Forrest, 2012, p. 176). The political nature of serving as a Senior Student Affairs Officer necessitates political engagement by the individual SSAO. However, some SSAOs may have a lack of interest in political engagement on their campus, due to a negative perception of politics as being self-serving for personal agendas and not for the good of the community (Herlein, Kretovics, Rossiter, & Sobczak, 2011). Yet, the political realities of a senior-level administrative position in a higher education institution are evident; through a survey completed by 58 SSAOs, Herlein, Kretovics, Rossiter, and Sobczak (2011) found that the majority of SSAOs (65.4%) reported that they spend, "between 11% and 50% of their time managing politics on their campuses" (p. 48). Further, over 96% of the survey respondents agree that to not participate politically as an SSAO is to operate without a full range of resources. The issues requiring the most political behavior, according to the survey respondents, were budgetary issues and resource allocation (Herlein, Kretovics, Rossiter, & Sobczak, 2011, pp. 46-47).

This highlights the necessary political engagement by SSAOs when seeking to acquire the resources for their divisions' operations (Lovell & Kosten, 2000, p. 567). When considering the technical nature of budgets and the dividing of resources between different divisions within a higher education institution, the pressure to align with normalized ways of assessing a division's impact on education also becomes evident. To make a case for resources through a vastly different rationality than the other divisional leaders of an institution may quickly harm an SSAOs ability to operate in meaningful ways. While the work of student affairs obviously differs greatly when compared to other divisions within a higher education institution, the perceived need to implement quantitative measures of student success should be apparent when budget and resource allocation is at stake. The normalization of technical rationality as an ethic of operation

by other leaders can only increase the perception that an SSAO who attempts to push back against such a rationality may face political difficulties.

Barone (2014) recognizes the incompatibility of being able to incorporate value-based judgments into decision-making as often leading to simply focusing on “metrics-based outcomes” (pp. 209-210). Vaala (1989) writes about student affairs administration in a manner that assumes that it is simply a “practical activity,” or a skill on which to be trained. This view of the role as a skill fails to recognize the complex nature of SSAOs responsibilities, and reduces it to a combination of *techne* and *episteme*—absent of *phronesis*. These normalized expectations regarding how one should act as an SSAO (all while under the surveillance methods of assessment and quantitative data), are counter to the virtuous character required of *phronesis*. Sometimes the desire to find an objective truth or to respond to accountability measures can contribute to a desire to develop policies as technological methods by which to prevent something from happening again; as Blimling (2008) writes,

Many of the laws and rules imposed on higher education by the government result from isolated incidents, one-time events, and bad decision making by a few. When an event is uncommon and the likelihood of it occurring again is minimal, the best policy may be no policy. (pp. 4-5)

Dalton (2002) recognizes that, what he calls practical wisdom, “is an important dimension of leadership not often discussed in the professional literature of student affairs because it is so difficult to define and measure” (p. 3). However, I think practical wisdom must not be ignored, due to the inability to study and write about it in normalized ways. The nature of practical wisdom must instead be considered truthfully, and the way in which it is studied must suit the nature of its immeasurability by standardized methods.

SSAOs must become more aware of the multiple consequences of their decisions. SSAOs should not divorce themselves of the subjectivities, values, and experiences spanning numerous

contexts; yet, that is what is required when one's work is reduced to a pre-established method absent of value rationality. In fact, being aware of values is vital for one to function from a place that is aware of the influencing factors (power relations and rationalities) that guide one's actions. To deny the complexity (and confusion) of our lived experiences is to live in an unsustainable state of denial; yet this state of denial becomes easier to accept when decision making is reduced to formulaic approaches (e.g. data-driven decisions). These approaches are informed by a utilitarian ethic that cannot consider the same value-based questions of which the *phronetic* leader is equipped to ask and act upon. A commitment to the development of oneself as a *phronetic* leader, who can attempt to resist the dangers of technical rationality and normalized relations of power, is a moral imperative facing SSAOs and the field of student affairs.

***Phronetic* Leadership: Considering What Can and Should be Done**

The problem is not of trying to dissolve [relations of power] in the utopia of a perfectly transparent communication, but to give...the rules of law, the techniques of management, and also the ethics...which would allow these games of power to be played with a minimum of domination. (Flyvbjerg, 1998, p. 223)

I understand *phronetic* leadership as an ideal for Senior Student Affairs Officers.

Phronetic leadership is not without its problems, even as an ideal. However, the kinds of questions that can be addressed, as well as the way in which these questions can be addressed, through *phronetic* leadership, offers possibilities in action that are absent in other forms of leadership which are shaped by different forms of rationality and therefore also understand ethics differently. The moral philosophy of my understanding of *phronetic* leadership is values-conscious and power-aware. *Phronetic* leadership allows the *phronetic* leader to act in ways that cannot be consistently achieved by non-*phronetic* leaders.

Through this study I seek to study *phronetic* leadership enacted, with an intention of gaining a better ability to recognize and describe the absence and presence of *phronetic* leadership. An exact method or technique of *phronetic* leadership will not be found in the works of either Aristotle or Foucault. Yet, one must look to both for guidance. I hold that a desire to find a prescriptive *techné* of leadership must be resisted, as this is a move to technical rationality, which is incompatible with *phronetic* leadership. That is not to say that *phronetic* leadership—as I have come to understand it—is absent of *techné* and *epistémé*. In fact, I argue that without *techné* and *epistémé* *phronetic* leadership is not possible; *phronetic* leadership allows one to ethically apply science and technology, rather than having either erase ethics (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 373). One must first acquire skill and knowledge, and put these in practice with virtuous character—repeatedly—in order to gain the experience that is required to develop practical wisdom. I understand *phronetic* leadership not as a final outcome or point of arrival. *Phronetic* leadership is difficult to describe or recognize, partly because one can only recognize glimpses of it through concrete and exact situations, and these glimpses have to be recognized by someone who has a conception of *phronetic* leadership. *Phronetic* leadership is not a method of leadership that is one-size-fits-all, as by its very definition is context dependent and values rational. Further, the individual enacting *phronetic* leadership (again not to be understood as a method of leadership) has a unique lived experience that has allowed them to have a unique and specialized form of practical wisdom whose contours and intricacies cannot be fully known by anyone else.

My conception of *phronetic* leadership, my predictions regarding how it can and cannot be recognized, and my view of *phronetic* leadership as an ideal all must be explored through this study. In many ways, the study participants will serve as co-researchers, because their interpretations of their own experiences, and the context of said experiences, is what can provide

a richer and clearer description of *phronetic* leadership. While my own experiences have helped provide me with valuable opportunities to observe leaders, as well as the ability to attempt to practice as a *phronetic* leader, it is without question that the complexities of problems, relations of power, and burden of responsibilities for a Senior Student Affairs Officer manifest in a kind of tension in action that is unique to the SSAO position. While I think that I have an awareness of many of the challenges faced by individuals in these positions, my awareness is limited to a generalized understanding. In order to explore these challenges, and understand them through a *phronetic* lens, I must situate them within each individual Senior Student Affairs Officers' contextual experience and wisdom.

This study focuses on individual Senior Student Affairs Officers. The concern is of a practical nature, regarding what the individual can do within their specific context. This is not a study that considers the actions and decisions of those individuals outside of the organizational hierarchy; instead, I embrace the realities of the inevitable tensions faced by SSAOs whose actions and decisions may appear to be, or may actually be in conflict. Yet, the practical activity of administering through one's various responsibilities, decisions, and actions is far too complex an activity to reduce to a single leadership theory or decision-making model. I am interested in how specific SSAOs are aware of the relations of power and politics as they participate in the practical activity of administrative leadership. SSAOs play a role in normalizing behaviors of students and the staff within their purview. SSAOs are acted upon by technologies of power, and they also act upon others by enforcing norms through technologies of power. The question then becomes how they can administer in such a way that they minimize their domination of said students and staff while simultaneously serving as governors of said individuals' behavior.

Phronetic leadership cannot be reduced to prescriptive methods, rather it must be enacted in continual practice by leaders who have extensive practical experience in student affairs, who maintain a steady pulse on their institutional community's values, history, norms, and politics, as well as the relations of power that can be explored through an analysis of institutional practices. Further, *phronetic* leadership maintains a commitment to working to disrupt relations of power and practices in ways that reduce domination. *Phronetic* leadership is not enacted as a method in moments of crisis or dilemma, rather it is embodied by the *phronetic* leader through everyday practices, language use, actions, as well as maintaining a commitment to reflective practice that strives to explore the various consequences of each decision and also aims for virtuous action. Through this conception of *phronetic* leadership it should be understood as a becoming of the leader; while one serves in roles that are designated as leadership roles there is always more work to be done on honing one's wisdom and character—through experience—therefore one's leadership is continually evolving.

Summary

I suggest that developing an understanding of *phronesis*, technical rationality, and relations of power holds promise in the endeavor of an SSAO's development as a *phronetic* leader. According to Kavanagh (2013), "part of the conceptual power of *phronesis* is that it counters the desire to create a systematic body of generalized knowledge (technical rationality) and reminds us that we should neither forget nor seek to overcome the conditionality, situatedness and historicity of human life." (p. 111). SSAOs that seek the ideal of *phronetic* leadership can begin to challenge existing relations of power in new ways that are not possible through method-based forms of leadership. No matter how an SSAO may dream about bringing about change as they make decisions, if they are informed only through technical rationality

nothing will change due to their leadership; instead, what will continue to be left is an illusion that something important has happened. This illusion is created through the functionalist, data-collecting, and universal seeking nature of technical rationality's promise. *Phronetic* leadership offers a better alternative through wise leadership that is contextually-situated, value-informed, and conscious of relations of power.

METHODS

This study involved in-depth qualitative narrative case studies of two Senior Student Affairs Officers. Specifically, the practice of *phronetic* leadership by these individuals was explored. How their abilities to practice *phronetic* leadership are impacted by power relations and technical rationality was of interest, as it relates to how they make decisions and serve as leaders. Aristotle's conception of *phronesis* and Foucault's understanding of power relations and regimes of rationality were used to explore and describe the experiences of the two participating Senior Student Affairs Officers. Flyvbjerg's (2001) description of *phronetic* social science as an ideal approach to social inquiry were incorporated in this study. Therefore, a *phronetic* approach to data collection and analysis was incorporated. I will first discuss the rationale for conducting research through a *phronetic* approach and how this aligns with the necessary epistemological assumptions that lead me to consider *phronetic* leadership as an ideal for Senior Student Affairs Officers. Next, I will describe the methods that were used during the study. Finally, I will discuss the selection of the participants, as well as how data were collected and analyzed.

Methodological Considerations

How research is conducted and why it is conducted is of primary methodological concern for qualitative *phronetic* research. It is also vital to not mimic or abide by incompatible standards/conceptions that adhere to a rationality that shapes naturalistic approaches to research. While the methods and skills of the researcher are important (the *how* of qualitative inquiry), the

primary point of continual return for the qualitative researcher must be the *why* of the research (Cheek, 2008, p. 206). If one reduces research design to a checklist of methods, with a primary goal of quantity of completed research in a specific period of time, then one is focusing on the productive value of research, which aligns with the priorities of technical rationality (Cheek, 2008, p. 207). The methods and skills of the researcher are highly important; however, they are not the most important. Ethical awareness of the productive effects of power relations and creation of official knowledge through forms of rationality is vital for researchers to understand, practice, and develop in order to not reproduce repressive forms of knowledge and power relations that continue to dominate the individuals/groups that are participating in the study.

A *phronetic* approach to research is consistent with an understanding of how to arrive at conceptions of what can be known as true in a given situation. Also, a *phronetic* approach to research is guided by the same moral philosophy as *phronesis*. As discussed in the literature review, *phronesis* does not lead one to seek to find universals or predictive capabilities under which to operate. Instead, a *phronetic* approach to social science focuses on concrete and specific practices, contexts, values of a community, regimes of rationality, and relations of power—all with an intent of exploring and describing the intricacies of a given problem. There is a focus on micro-arrangements (i.e. politics, ethics, policies), and there is an ethical commitment to bring transparency to these micro-arrangements that are not separate from a problem but may at first be invisible to the researcher. It is through *phronetic* qualitative inquiry that a more detailed and truthful understanding of a problem may be explored; this requires participation by wise individuals who have lived-experiences that inform their understandings of the problem. Therefore, the selection of participants for this kind of inquiry is of the utmost importance, as the understanding and analysis that is possible is largely dependent upon the kinds of experiences

that the participants have had, as well as their character dispositions. Further, the participants' reflective abilities to analyze their experiences with an awareness of the productive effects of power relations and regimes of rationality, as well as an awareness of their role as governors of others' conduct, is a key component that can determine the richness of description and analysis of the problem. In fact, a *phronetic* approach to qualitative inquiry should be committed to enhancing these areas of awareness by the participants. Enhancing the individual participants' *phronetic* leadership capacities is an ethical move by the researcher. Put simply, outcomes of *phronetic* research should never be limited to the production of publishable material that is to be consumed by scholars, as this would align with a moral philosophy that is consistent with technical rationality's ends of production. Instead, *phronetic* research, if conducted in an excellent manner, will enhance the critical abilities, leadership abilities, and ultimately practice wisdom of both the researcher and the participants.

In order to make a claim to the value of conducting *phronetic* qualitative inquiry, it is important to discuss how *phronetic* social science differs from other approaches to social science; Schram (2012), at least in part, addresses the question of how *phronetic* social science differs from the other approaches to social science: "phronetic social science...rejects the fact-value distinction prevalent in mainstream social science and focuses its efforts on...enhancing practice wisdom" (p. 20). Schram (2012) continues to explain that, "phronetic social science is concentrated on producing research that helps make a difference in people's lives by focusing on what it would really take to make that difference on the issues that matter to them most and which most crucially affect them" (p. 20). An awareness of values and a consideration of values is necessary when conducting *phronetic* inquiry; for, the researcher must be aware of the values of a community in order to analyze data with an understanding of how these values are

contradicted or supported through the implementation of various practices. With this prioritization of considering values, Flyvbjerg (2001) developed four critical questions that must be asked through *phronetic* social science when investigating the problem of what matters most to people; these questions are:

- 1) where are we going?
- 2) who gains and who loses, by which mechanisms of power?
- 3) is it desirable?
- 4) what should be done? (p. 162).

Phronetic researchers should be guided by these questions, as they specifically relate to questions of ethical action; these questions are not just limited to considerations of *techne* and *episteme* (method and knowledge). While these value-conscious questions are asked, the researcher must be aware that perspective is important, and the researcher should, “see no neutral ground, no ‘view from nowhere’, for their work” (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 374). This emphasizes how research must be viewed as an ethical move, and therefore the ethical decisions of the researcher must be continually considered and reflected upon; each action and inaction is an ethical decision, and the researcher is inevitably making ethical decisions throughout the course of a study. Therefore, the ethics of the researcher must be dynamic, which allows the researcher to respond in a contextually situated manner as unpredictable scenarios arise. Planning is also important, but part of the planning process must involve the awareness that the plan will inevitably need to change in relation to the participants, the analysis, and the narratives. Similar to planning a hiking trip in the woods, while a trail route can be planned and followed on a map, the necessary route may change due to weather conditions, erosion of the trail, and the health of the hiker. So too must the *phronetic* researcher be ready to shift approaches and not just

prescriptively apply a pre-planned set of methods that could prove to be unethical or incompatible with the intended goals of the study. The researcher must always remain vigilant by considering and reflecting on the relations of power that are present within the context of a study (i.e., between researcher and participant/subject and between researcher and their profession).

Phronetic inquiry requires a continual consideration of means and ends; means and ends must be put in conversation and the tension between the *how* and the *why* of the research must remain ever present for the researcher. The *phronetic* researcher's methods must be informed by the specific problem that is being studied, and the outcomes of the study should contribute to action (Flyvbjerg, 2004). *Phronetic* inquiry should not be seen as producing answers that can be universally applied, such as laws that appear to predict human behavior. Instead, this form of inquiry should be seen as shaping the dialogue surrounding specific problems (Flyvbjerg, 2006).

Methods: Narrative Case Study

Through consideration of methods that will best align with the purpose and ethical considerations of this study, I selected narrative case study as the primary strategy of inquiry. As a method, narrative case study supports qualitative inquiry that is focused on exploring the practices, processes, and techniques that have been experienced by and interpreted by the participants. The contexts of the participants' lived experiences were considered through the narrative case study approach. A case study, according to Gillham (2000) is:

- A unit of human activity embedded in the real world;
- Which can only be studied or understood in context;
- Which exists in the here and now;
- That merges in with its context so that precise boundaries are difficult to draw (p. 1).

It is with this understanding of the complexities inherent with each case that a researcher must take care to value context and nuance. The case study approach allows for a collection of a range

of different kinds of information and evidence regarding the problem, rather than relying on one form of evidence that risks initial assumptions about what is true (and not) regarding the problem (Gillham, 2000, p. 1). The cases that were part of this inquiry are current or former Senior Student Affairs Officers. While their current and ongoing experiences were part of the study, their past experiences were also relevant, as the way in which they have navigated various roles in higher education administration, have acquired knowledge and understanding, have gained practical experience, and have developed individual forms of ethics all contributed to the development of their individual narratives.

Narratives are “the study of the ways humans experience the world” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2). Narratives, according to Landman (2012),

Are at a base level ‘stories’ that people tell about things that they have experienced directly or indirectly, as well as the evaluative impressions that those experiences carry with them (e.g., the subjective experiences and registering of emotions, feelings and insights connected to such experiences). (p. 28)

These stories shared by research participants can be complemented with artifacts that exist outside of a traditional interview structure (i.e. journals, e-mails, news articles, etc.) (Landman, 2012). Narratives include details about start date (onset) and end date (duration), magnitude and size (i.e. organizations, individuals, and groups involved), and the things that research participants have done, as well as things that have happened to them (i.e. changing jobs to work for a new higher education institution, or being fired from a job at a higher education institution) (Landman, 2012).

In this study, I sought to construct narratives for the individual participants in this study. Their experiences spanned several decades, so the study was not reduced to a narrative about one specific decision or event, but rather their lived experience and the wisdom they have gained from their various experiences. The lived experiences of these participants could not be reduced

to moments that represented their practice as a Senior Student Affairs Officer, as I understood their ethics, values, and rationality as constantly being in flux and being informed and influenced as they engaged in different experiences. With a recognition of the importance of constructing a narrative that was not just a ‘professional’ narrative, the sequence of the stories shared by participants was largely preserved to account for the clarity in communication that developed between the researcher and the participants. This sequence preservation was done with a goal of not fracturing the data without presenting the broader narrative and wealth of details (Riessman, 2008). While I did attempt to identify themes through analysis across both cases, these themes are but one approach to my analysis. This approach was specifically intended to identify similarities in the lived experiences of both participants, while also presenting both individual narratives so as not to represent their experiences in a reductionary manner that equates similar themes with sameness in experience.

Narrative inquiry as an approach sought to honor the lived experiences of the participants and the understanding and wisdom they have that has developed in concert with these experiences. The narratives were developed through the texts (interviews, emails, etc.) that were produced by the participants. These narratives included participants’ responses to questions that sought to explore the processes and practices by which power relations have been productive and regimes of rationality have influenced their decisions and actions (Tamboukou, 2013). The contexts and consequences of the different stories shared by participants are functions of their narrative, and these are vital to explore in relation to power and rationality (Mishler, 1995). While all responses from the participants were not included in the form of stories, the responses they did share contributed to the development of their unique narrative by the researcher.

To generate these narratives, I conducted multiple (five) in-depth open interviews with each study participant, with each interview lasting between one to two hours. Conducting in-depth interviews that were intended to develop a narrative for the individual participants was a key part of the approach, as the participants are/were in elite professional positions; due to the nature of their experience in these elite positions, they may have developed habits of communication that can reveal little information while still providing a response to a question. So, the type of inquiry was particularly promising when it came to overcoming these potential barriers; in addition, the previously established rapport between the researcher and the participants helped with overcoming these potential barriers in truthful sharing of experiences. The interviews served as the primary source of data from which narratives were developed; however, I also asked the participants to reflect on questions, thoughts, and experiences that they became aware of between interviews. I asked them to choose a method to record these thoughts in a way that was easiest for them (i.e., through journaling, by e-mail, etc.) and then asked them to share those reflections with me in advance of our scheduled interviews, as well as to use them as reminders for discussion during the upcoming interview. I had limited success with this, as the participants most often did not engage in concrete ways outside of the scheduled interviews. They both referenced being busy and having a lack of time to dedicate to the additional thought outside the scheduled interviews. I reflected by writing questions and thoughts outside of the scheduled interviews, with the intention of enhancing my questions and understandings. This approach of writing for thinking in-between interview sessions was an attempt to extend the reflexivity of the participants and the researcher beyond a structured set of time during which the interview is conducted. So, through the conduction of interviews and post-interview journaling, case study narratives were constructed for each of the participants whose lived experiences serve

as case studies of Senior Student Affairs Officers' approaches to decision making and leadership. Through a narrative approach to qualitative inquiry, the participants were given the opportunity to share knowledge about the world that they have gained through experience, which could also be called wisdom (Kim, 2016).

Participants

Participants of the study were current or former Senior Student Affairs Officers who have worked as higher education administrators for 20 or more years. Through their experience they have had the opportunity to gain in-depth practical experience in the field. Further, the participants have experience working at a number of different institutions; I hope that this enabled them to reflect on potential difference in their experiences at said institutions. Being granted access to these busy individuals' schedules, in an intimate intellectual manner, was no small challenge. An existing relationship defined by trust was vital to achieve the depth of exploration I was seeking regarding their thought processes and lived experiences.

There are different ways I could have gone about trying to seek participants for the study, however, the challenge with any of the methods of selection would relate to finding participants who have the time to spare, who see value in the research, and who are able to trust me when talking about relations of power that could be perceived as potentially impacting their job security.

In addition, selecting individuals who I evaluated as having the character dispositions that are necessary for *phronetic* leadership was a vital component of participant selection. With these requirements and challenges in mind, I intentionally sought participants I already knew and with whom I had an established relationship that meant trust existed. Because I knew them, I was already familiar with their character dispositions and values and I was also aware of various

professional challenges they had faced as an administrative leader in student affairs. The participants I selected were individuals whom I respected, had an established ethical commitment of care for, and who I classify as mentors. Having individuals participate in the study with whom I already have an established relationship should have benefitted both of us. This pre-established connection allowed me to gain access to a complexity of thought, feelings, and perceptions that would likely not have been accessible if I had attempted to build rapport with participants I did not previously know. The relationship with the participants was viewed as a collaborative relationship, which allowed the participants to share their meanings by providing them the space to share their stories in a way that would give their narratives authority and validity (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). So, the selection of participants was an essential part of the planning and conduction of this study, as a randomized selection of participants would not have been in alignment with the goals and purpose of the study.

The selection of individuals who I perceive as having demonstrated *phronetic* leadership aligns with the purpose of the study to study individual cases who appear to demonstrate *phronetic* or *phronetic*-like leadership. Further, already having previous context regarding the individuals' practical experience may have allowed me to specifically focus on problems that the individuals are facing or have faced in their position(s). Participating in a study regarding *phronesis* should have benefitted the participants, as it granted them the opportunity to practice reflexivity as an administrator, as well as possibly allowing them to consider the complexities of challenges that they encounter when attempting to make decisions that are in the best interest of their communities of practice.

Data Collection

The plan for data collection was drafted before beginning the study, however, due to the necessary emergent nature of qualitative research, the process could not be prescribed in an exact manner (Creswell, 2014). Further, the questions that I planned to ask changed during the course of the interviews, my understandings shifted, and ethical considerations adjusted in relation to concerns for the participants; thus, to avoid attempting to study *phronesis* without incorporating a *phronetic* approach, the exactness of techniques and methods were determined throughout the research process—in relation to the context of the study.

The primary form of data collection was semi-structured, one-on-one interviews. This means that I had an outline for each interview, which included possible interview questions and topics that I wanted to cover during the course of each interview. However, I remained open during each interview to the unpredictable changes in interview topics, due to the nature of the conversations. These interviews took place as phone calls, rather than in-person, due to the logistical and budgetary difficulties related to conducting multiple in-depth interviews with the participants who live in different locations than the researcher. Data was also collected in the form of personal notes by the researcher, and this practice was encouraged for the participants. These analytical notes were recorded immediately after interviews, and between interviews by the researcher, as well as while transcribing the interviews. Between interviews the researcher communicated with participants by email to share a follow-up question, as well as to share resources that the researcher hoped would assist with the participants' understanding of concepts that were being discussed. In many ways this was a learning process by which I continually tried new approaches and methods to communicate concepts in a way that would allow for richer

discussion. Analytical notes were recorded in an attempt to record moments of clarity or meaning-making that took place outside of the interviews.

Interview Process

Before conducting the interviews, I developed an outline for the schedule of interviews to be conducted with the participants, which included the general topic for each interview, as well as examples of interview questions that would serve as priming questions during the interview. The semi-structured process of each interview depended on the context of the situation, the concerns of the participant, and the understanding of the researcher. Therefore, a regimented guide and schedule could not be developed that could be followed in a pre-prescribed manner; however, planning for an outline of interviews was a necessary component of preparation to ensure timely conduction of interviews and that the goals of the study remained a focus.

Before conducting interviews that were recorded, I communicated with the participants to schedule interviews in advance that would coincide with their busy schedules. Part of the challenge was finding times that would coincide with my availability and that of the participants. Inevitably I also had to remain flexible as there were times where interviews had to be rescheduled or delayed due to changes in availability. Before conducting interviews I also requested and received a current copy of each participant's curriculum vitae; this was used as documentation of their experience, education, and various institutions in which they have worked, and the professional and volunteer positions they have held. This was a helpful reference for me as I developed summaries for both participant's experiences, and also as I considered the context of their professional experience and educational background. Before the first interview I shared a practical example of my experience in student affairs that I originally wrote as an introductory piece for my proposal defense; this practical example helped me frame

my critiques and apply concepts to my own experience. I had little success with getting the participants to read this document before conducting the interviews, or even after interviews were being conducted, but I still think the attempt to share this information with them was one that I would suggest for future studies. The document was meant to serve as an introduction to my critique of technical rationality and introduce them to the concept of *phronesis*.

I originally planned to conduct ten interviews with each participant, with each interview lasting roughly one hour. This plan was based on my estimations regarding the topics that I wished to cover, and the time that I believed would be needed to cover the topics. What I found was that I was able to cover the topics within the span of five interviews with each participant, as well as a follow-up conversation after taking the time to analyze the data and summarize follow-up questions. Also, most of the interviews took between an hour and a half to two hours. One of the participants talked more quickly than the other, so the interviews with that participant averaged less time than with the other participant. At the conclusion of each interview I attempted to summarize the main topics that were discussed and provided items that I would like the participants to consider further before the next interview. Between each interview I reviewed the data from the past interview, and I attempted to transcribe the interview and provide initial analysis. Through this process I also developed a focus for the questions to ask at the beginning of the next interview.

Before interviews. I communicated with participants to schedule interviews in advance that would coincide with their availability. I also requested a current copy of their curriculum vitae; this was used as documentation of their experience, education, and the various institutions in which they have worked, as well as the professional and volunteer positions they have held. Before the first interview I will also share a written practical example of my experience in

student affairs that will serve to introduce them to my critique of technical rationality and introduce them to the concept of *phronesis*. Before conducting the first interview I drafted a proposed interview schedule that consisted of ten one-hour interviews. I ended up being able to reduce the number of interviews due to the nature of the richness of data; each interview also lasted longer than an hour, so more topics were covered in individual interviews than I originally planned. Interview questions that were drafted in advance of the interviews are provided in Appendix A of this dissertation.

In-between interviews. After each interview concluded I attempted to transcribe each interview before the next interview took place with each participant. I was not always able to fully transcribe each interview. However, I listened to each interview in order to identify themes or concepts that I wanted to return to in the next interview. I would then prepare notes for the topic or theme I wanted to return to in the next interview. While I did refer to possible interview questions that I had prepared in advance of the first interview, I found that it was necessary for me to adjust the questions I asked to fit the evolving conversation that was taking place between me and each participant.

Interview one. An introduction to the research questions and my conception of technical rationality and power were discussed in relation to decision making by leaders. I discussed the participants' personal backgrounds with them (i.e., education, professional positions held, institutions for which they have worked). This initial discussion and their curriculum vitae informed my basic descriptive understandings of their experiences in relation to time and place. I also asked them to talk about their pre-professional background as it related to their family structure, where they lived as an adolescent, what kinds of schools they attended, etc. This ended up being the richest discussion from this interview (for both participants). The first interview

served as a foundational conversation across future interviews. The themes identified by both Joan and Jacob were themes that were returned to as relating to their approach to making decisions and leading as Senior Student Affairs Officers.

Interview two. I planned to focus on the moral development of the participants by asking questions about their upbringing as a child and young adult. These topics actually ended up being discussed in the first interview for both participants, and then continued in greater detail during the second interview. Questions related to the participants' understanding of ethics, what values were and are of primary importance to them, what it means to live a good life, and how they understand ethical decision-making as it relates to leadership. The influence of childhood friends, school, and the Catholic church all ended up being topics that were focused on by both participants. In addition, the influence of specific adult family members was mentioned. Both participants also brought up events that occurred in society when they were children and young adults that they identified as influencing their view of the world and shaped their values.

Interview three. Conceptions of the participants' understanding of the Senior Student Affairs Officer (SSAO) position was part of the focus of this interview. Questions related to how the participants describe the SSAO position, how they view the position/role as having developed over time, why they think the role has come to be the way it is within United States higher education, how professional associations have influenced the development of the position, how the role differs from other higher education administrative positions, how the role is similar to other higher education administrative positions, the general responsibilities and challenges of the role, and how the role fits into a higher education institution's community. Both participants discussed the larger changes in higher education (such as increased access) that they view as impacting not only student affairs but other areas of higher education. Additionally, they both

discussed the challenges that they believe relate to the increasing cost of attendance, as well as the changing perception by parents and students.

In-between interviews three and four. I checked-in with participants regarding their understanding to that point, and if they felt that there was anything we had not yet discussed or that they felt that I may not understand about their views on leadership. I also discussed how I thought that the schedule of interviews could be adjusted and that another two to three interviews would likely meet my needs as a researcher. This was an important point of reflection related to my analysis and the narratives. Their responses during this time also served as further data that was incorporated to my analysis.

Interview four. During this interview I largely focused on the participants' understandings of technical rationality, how they attempt to gather information when making decisions, how they understand power, and if they consider the consequence of common sense in practices. Additionally, I asked them to describe their awareness of values when making decisions.

Interview five. During the fifth and final interview I focused on the participants' understanding of practical wisdom, and if they agreed with my view of *phronetic* leadership as an ideal. I provided the opportunity for them to describe how they attempt to serve as a leader while being aware of the challenges we discussed in previous interview.

Analysis

Analysis of narratives is case-centered (Reissman, 2008). My approach to analysis was grounded in an awareness that narrative inquiry is a, "process of collaboration involving mutual storytelling and restorytelling as the research proceeds" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 4). Therefore, I recognized that the understanding and narrative was being collaboratively

constructed during the interviews, and my engagement with the data during transcription and analysis was a form of restorytelling. This is why I took the approach of developing an ongoing conversation within the transcribed interview responses of the participants which took the form of adding in my own analysis and understandings within the transcribed interview data.

Throughout my analysis I incorporated an awareness of themes and categories of data that may relate to technical rationality, relations of power, ethical decision-making, values of the participants, values of their communities, regimes of rationality, official knowledge, technologies of power, practical wisdom, skill, and knowledge, and other topics that may have related to the problem. I also regularly referred to my research questions so as to ground my thinking, and I also referred to my intended purpose of the study as a reminder of my stated goals. A research log was maintained as an element of analysis designed to assist with a reflective awareness of themes and questions. The research log included post-interview memos that highlighted points that were prominent to me immediately after conducting an interview. The log was used for personal notes including questions on which I needed to reflect, points of clarity to bring up in future interviews with the participants, ethical considerations that necessitate a reflective decision, and other items that were not foreseeable before the conduction of the interview (Gillham, 2000).

There were several moments that stood out to me for the ethical considerations that were highlighted. This included a recognition of the ethical considerations that were present when transcribing the interviews. I found that I questioned how to present the participants' responses and also found that the meaning perceived from written and spoken communication varied greatly. I viewed this difference with an awareness of the importance of how the data is presented for those who will read this study. I felt an ethical responsibility to take care with the

manner in which I transcribed interviews, which is largely why I chose to review and transcribe each interview personally, so as to engage with the data in multiple ways and at multiple times. Transcribing the interviews was a form of analysis that would have been lost if I did not transcribe the interviews myself. In addition, there were moments during which I struggled with what I would include or exclude from the narratives that were presented, as well as from the excerpts of data that were included.

The first step I took in the analysis process was to fully transcribe all interviews. Then I went back through the transcriptions to attempt to identify areas that I believed needed to be removed out of concern for maintaining confidentiality of the participants' identities. This involved a few sections of responses that I discussed with my dissertation chair as serving as rich examples that directly related to my critique, and yet I did not believe that I could include them out of the ethical concerns relating to taking care for the participants and maintaining confidentiality. I chose to exclude or mask various detailed responses, as I determined that my decision must be guided through a prioritization of care for the participants and not a prioritization of research findings above the ethical care for individuals. This was an ethical commitment that I constantly reminded myself of, and frankly was a line I put in place for myself so as to try to avoid a slippery slope of fetishizing the data and disregarding that people (the participants) could have their lives impacted by my choices as a researcher. Through reflection I realized that this choice was an easier one to make due to my pre-existing relationship with the participants, and therefore caring commitment to them. I also reminded myself of this commitment, and I realized that I needed to extend this same level of care to other administrators that were originally discussed in a previous introduction that reflected on my own lived experiences.

The meanings that the participants developed in their understanding of the things they have done, and the things that have happened to them, served as points of analysis (Creswell, 2014). These meanings may have been stated by the participants during the interviews, however, it was also important for me to ask clarifying questions regarding their meanings; these clarifying questions were in the form of follow-up questions during the course of interviews, as well as clarifying questions that were shared after the conclusion of interviews, with the intention of returning to a concept or event that was discussed during a previous interview. As I transcribed interviews I realized that there were points of clarification that I wished to bring up in future interviews, as well as in communication between and after interviews; this highlighted the need for the research process to allow for open interviews and a dynamic interaction between myself and the research participants.

Each interview was recorded, with the consent of the participants, and these recordings were transcribed. Through the transcribing of the interviews, I focused on attempting to develop a narrative for each participant. This valuing of the researcher's judgment to discern what is of primary importance to note within the context of the interview is in alignment with *phronetic* qualitative research. Analytic memos also served as a form of analysis by which themes and narratives were developed and compared (Saldaña, 2013). I used these memos as references when reading through the transcripts and attempting to identify salient themes that related to the theoretical underpinnings of the study. My approach to analysis had the intention of viewing the participants' lives and my own life as a whole, "into which the fragmented parts of narratives" could be integrated and embodied (MacIntyre & Dunne, 2002 as cited in Kim, 2016, p. 19). This holistic approach aligns with an Aristotelian understanding of how one develops wisdom through experience.

Summary

Throughout this chapter I have provided a description of the methodological implications of this study, as it relates to *phronetic* qualitative inquiry. The rationality, assumptions, and approaches that do and do not support this kind of qualitative inquiry were discussed. Then, the method of narrative case study, and how it is supportive of the questions being asked was discussed. The rationale for the selection of participants was described, particularly as it pertained to the kinds of practical experience within the field of student affairs. The development of a plan for data collection was also discussed, as well as the need to remain flexible through the process of conducting the study. Finally, the means of analyzing the data was provided.

NARRATIVE FINDINGS – PARTICIPANT 1: JOAN

Joan's Background

Joan is a former Senior Student Affairs Officer. Though she retired in the past two years from full-time work, she continues to work as a consultant part-time. Joan thinks that she is not likely to return to a full-time Senior Student Affairs Officer role, though she may consider interim roles in the future. Joan was born in the mid-1950s. Throughout the interview process Joan demonstrated a strong interest in the topics being discussed, particularly topics related to how a leader's decisions always have ethical consequence. Joan demonstrated a strong understanding of Aristotelian virtue ethics, as she had previously studied Aristotle, and her approach to leadership resembled that of a leader who possesses the character dispositions that make virtuous decisions likely. Joan did not possess an awareness of Foucault or any of his concepts, including self-surveillance.

Educational background. While also working full-time, Joan earned a Ph.D. in Education when she was in her thirties. She also earned her Master's of Education in Personnel Services (with an emphasis in Counseling) while she was working as a full-time higher education administrator. Joan earned a bachelor's degree in Psychology, with the coursework that she said was two courses away from qualifying for a second major in Philosophy. Joan's higher education degrees were earned at four-year public state universities in the Southeastern United States. Joan's elementary, middle,

and high school education mainly consisted of attending Catholic schools, and Joan graduated from an all-girls Catholic high school in the Southeastern United States.

Professional experience. Joan holds extensive administrative experience (38 years) in higher education administration. She gained professional experience at six different doctoral-degree awarding public universities. Joan's foundational professional experiences are in enrollment management. She worked strictly in enrollment management roles before taking on senior executive roles in student affairs, while also maintaining administrative responsibilities in enrollment management. Joan served as the Senior Student Affairs Officer, or reported directly to an institution's Senior Student Affairs Officer for nearly twelve years. Throughout her professional experience she had responsibilities related to fiscal and strategic planning, supervision of multiple departments, conduction of assessment, market research, collaboration with multiple divisions and departments, and divisional reorganization.

Teaching experience. For nearly fifteen years Joan served as an adjunct professor or part-time faculty member; she taught undergraduate courses as well as student affairs graduate-level courses.

Professional service. Joan has a history of extensive involvement in professional associations, which includes voluntary leadership positions, submitting articles for publication, and presenting at conferences.

Joan's Narrative

Joan's career in higher education administration began in enrollment management, specifically in admissions. Working in higher education was not part of a long-term plan that she had, but rather was related to her interest in working with people and organizations that are of service to people. Joan remembered that she always had a desire to be of service to others, which

at times led to a consideration of pursuing a career as a lawyer or a politician. She described her decision to apply for her first job in higher education administration as a pragmatic decision due to needing to obtain a job after graduating from college.

Values. From a young age Joan shared that she had an awareness regarding expectations of how she was expected to act, or not act, due to the position her father held in a company. Her father's position was one that she described as being at the level of a vice president, and he supervised many people in the towns in which her family lived; these people were often the fathers of Joan's childhood friends. So, Joan realized she represented her father through the way she acted. Because of her father's professional role, Joan was aware that there were standards of behavior that were expected of her, and she recognized these as social norms that matched the social class of her family. She communicated this awareness in the following interview quote:

The values that I was taught by my parents, which included valuing education, as well as through attending Catholic schools, sparked a need to understand and a desire to serve a greater good. This included a desire to make sure that wherever students come from and whoever they are, that the way that I served would help make sure students have opportunities beyond high school, beyond their community, and beyond what they knew when they begin attending college.

Fundamentals. Joan was raised attending Catholic churches and she primarily attended Catholic schools; she credited her experiences with both institutions (e.g. church and school) as shaping her commitment to habits of excellence that she called, "fundamentals." In addition, Joan recognized that what was happening in society when she was growing up influenced the development of her values and ethical commitments. She often credited her father's wisdom as serving as a guide in her life, and she said that she often went to him for advice as an adult and professional. Her father communicated a standard of excellence that he expected of her and her siblings that she said she carries with her to this day. Joan discussed her concept of a yard stick to measure one's behaviors and decisions as being acceptable:

You have to test your own vision of yourself in mirror. I've always thought of the idea of having a yard stick in your life to measure your own behavior against, and I think that goes back to how I was raised at home and in the Catholic church. It's striving to make decisions that are consistent and equitable; it's not about what's fair. Fair is a word that has so many different definitions and understandings that it can't be used as a yard stick.

The Civil Rights movement, the assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr., President John Fitzgerald Kennedy, and Robert Kennedy, and the Vietnam War were all referenced by Joan as having influenced her understanding of the world and what she deemed as acceptable and unacceptable actions. Joan viewed the institutions in which she has worked as microcosms of society in which the Senior Student Affairs Officer is tasked with navigating the challenges that are tied to a complicated and ever unfolding history in the United State of America.

Ethical consequence. One of Joan's first jobs in higher education was as an admissions recruiter. In this role Joan traveled within a few different states to recruit high school students to the university for which she worked. It was in this role that Joan began to view her work as being dedicated to something larger than the completion of tasks, and she recognized a necessary ethical commitment in her work when she began to recognize she was accountable to the public. She saw herself as being of service to the students she was recruiting, and she saw her work as serving a purpose that was focused on improving those students' lives. This included seeking to be truthful and ethical when recruiting students; she said that she observed other college recruiters knowingly lie to students or over-promise to shape unrealistic expectations, and these college recruiters did that in order to increase the number of students they were credited with having recruited. Joan said that was a line she was never willing to cross, as she recognized the importance of ethics in her work. She also realized that different students are best suited to attend certain institutions that can best meet their needs and desires, so she believed it was important to educate the potential student about what her institution could and could not offer them through

degree programs, student life opportunities, etc. Joan learned over time that her values were most in alignment with the mission of land-grant institutions, which ties into her focus and discussion of valuing increased access to college. In particular, she found herself drawn to helping young women find success in their own dreams of obtaining a college education; in many of the high schools in which she recruited, Joan recognized that many of the young women came from less privileged backgrounds than her own, as she was often recruiting in impoverished areas of the Southeast. Joan also observed and experienced the difficulties faced by professional women who faced barriers when attempting to challenge the status quo when seeking to be hired for jobs that were traditionally segregated by gender for men or by attempting to get promoted into positions of leadership that were predominately held by men at the time.

Culture. Joan worked at public universities in five different Southeastern states, and each of her experiences differed to the extent that she began to recognize the impact that each state's culture, politics, and norms had on her work as a higher education administrator working for a state-supported public institution. This diversity of experience gave her the opportunity to view differences in the values and rationalities that guided her work at each university. The values and norms of the states shaped the admissions standards that were not only desired, but also considered common sense within each state, and Joan was able to recognize how those had tangible impacts on her practices as an administrator who always had admissions oversight. It was partially due to this awareness that Joan began to seek to work for institutions that she assessed as having missions that aligned with her personal values, so as to be able to practice in a manner that allowed her to make decisions that more closely matched her own values. She said that this helped her feel fulfilled in her work as she recognized greater consistency in espoused values and enacted values. Joan went from working at a more selective institution to working at

institutions that were less selective in their admissions standards (e.g. provided greater access to college). Joan pointed to this as a crossroad in her career, as well as an influence on values, because she almost moved to work at institutions that she perceived as being more selective than her first institution; her first institution ended up having the most stringent admissions standards of any of the institutions she worked for later. Joan's awareness of the impact of place on her own development of values, as well as ability to practice in alignment with her values, highlights how the context of a community's norms and dominant rationality influence individual leader's approaches to decision-making—often in ways that become embodied as the leader begins to self-surveil their decisions to adhere to said contexts. Joan not only described the impact of the context of one's higher education institution as impacting decision making, she also described the impact of one's past experiences as impacting how she made decisions in the future, because she carried forward certain values and common sense that she developed by working at her first institution. In fact, Joan regularly credited her first boss as a mentor who imparted wisdom that she continued to refer to later in her career, and she also believed that due to the perceived academic stature of her first employing institution, she was granted employment opportunities by other institutions that were attempting to change the public perception of the institution through changes in enrollment management practices. While Joan did not describe herself as such, it is apparent that the skills, experience, and knowledge she gained were viewed as valuable to institutions who were engaged in the discourse of competition in higher education and therefore desired to not only increase the quantity of enrolled students but also to increase the perceived quality of the value of their degrees.

Purpose. Her values and commitment to fundamentals (e.g. habits) were evident in the way that Joan described her desire to be a servant leader who had a clear vision of her purpose

and responsibility to those in the community in which she served. She identified students as the primary constituents that she served, and she described that purpose as always being present when she made decisions. To be of service to students often did not mean directly working with the students, but it always meant thinking of the students in the university community and how she could maintain the community in a manner that provided opportunities for those students as well as thinking about how to sustain the community, so as to provide opportunities for future students. Joan identified fundamentals (which I relate to habits) as being vital to leadership, and yet she believed that a focus on fundamentals does not hold value in a contemporary setting:

I think that a focus on fundamentals is something that does not occur as much as it used to, but I think it's the thing that is vital for focusing on the long-term sustainment of making things better in an excellent manner. But, fundamentals take time to develop, and cultural change to development and value fundamentals is something that takes a long time and continuity of leadership.

Joan's recognition of the need for fundamentals relates to the honing of one's character dispositions and the development of practical wisdom. She did not think that practical wisdom can be gained without developing one's character, and she believed that character can only be developed over time and through experience; this is why Joan described this process as one that takes time and ultimately labeled it as cultural change when describing what this means when a leader recognizes a lack of this kind of commitments within a community. Joan recognized that the development of the right kind of dispositions of character are important for all within the purview of the leader, so as to set the tone regarding the standard of excellence; this included at times holding individuals accountable who demonstrated the wrong character disposition (e.g. by lying or stealing) and therefore Joan saw it as necessary to reprimand or fire these individual, as she was aware that this was also a part of her responsibility as the leader who set the bar for what was acceptable or not.

Wisdom. Joan said that she recognizes that her approach to her work and her ideas about people changed dramatically over the span of her career, specifically as she developed her character and gained practice experience and practical wisdom. In addition, she pointed to her experience as a doctoral student as having drastically impacted her ability to be a more competent and thoughtful leader. As a doctoral student she gained experience that helped her look at a problem more thoroughly, and she believed this improved her approach to making decisions as her awareness of the impacts of her decisions expanded in breadth and complexity.

While Joan was focused on serving others, she shared some of the struggles and difficulties she faced as a younger professional, which included times that she felt that her focus was not on striving for what would be called the virtuous action, but rather what could be understood as trending to vice. At times Joan said she got caught up in her own success and would verge on arrogance. When acting arrogantly she said she would therefore lack humility in her decision making and would assume that her perceptions would always be accurate. She communicated this thought in the following quote:

The past has shown me that there is a constant balance against arrogance that you can figure things out when jumping off the cliff. Some of that you can only learn through experience. Education and knowledge without experience is a very dangerous thing.

However, she said that with more experience, and with a focus on fundamentals, she was able to ground herself by focusing on her primary mission—to be of service to students; she continually returned to that goal throughout her career. Joan’s recognition of the struggles that are inevitable as a leader, as well as the constant focus she believed one must have on aligning one’s actions with one’s values are consistent with living in a manner that Aristotle would describe as flourishing; the honorable person attempts to live a ‘good life’ that is virtuous.

Qualitative understanding. Joan demonstrated that she was cognizant of the multiplicity of understandings and perceptions that individuals can have within the same time and space, which contributes to differentiation in what is understood through lived experience. This was evident when Joan discussed the different meanings that she and her siblings gained from their upbringing in the Catholic church, in Catholic schools, and in their family. This highlights the traces of the worldview that became evident throughout the interviews with Joan. She questioned how notions of truth must be considered when looking through the lens of one's own experience. She took care in communicating that what she interprets to be true does not stand as a universal truth; instead, Joan values context when making decisions, as well as gathering data in the form of assessing the culture of an institution, the historical context of an institution's practices, and the perceptions of other administrators serving within the institution. Joan referenced the importance of maintaining relationships with others who can serve as yardsticks for one's decisions, and she also discussed the importance of maintaining relationships that are not based in a professional connection as she believed familial relationships and friendships are important for an individual to remain balanced and happy when constantly encountering the stressors of serving as an SSAO. In the following quote Joan discussed the importance of mentorship in informing one's decisions or for getting feedback on decisions before making a decision:

I often practice a more qualitative approach to decision making. Mentoring is vital to support this kind of decision making, including peer mentorship. You have to find people who will tell you the truth and challenge you. So, you have to look for people who keep you in check and constantly challenge you. It's important to recognize that ideas come from everywhere, and you have to be humble and realize that you won't always be right. This allows you to run ideas by people who will give feedback to you on your line of thinking being wrong. Even when you are highly intuitive regarding people and groups of people you have to be very careful to not be overly confident in your perceptions, even if your intuitions are correct more often than not.

Joan referred to herself as a social scientist, and her description of social science appeared similar to Bent Flyvbjerg's (2001) understanding of social science as not being the same form of science or serving the same purpose as the natural sciences. Her understanding of social science is not one that adheres to notions of validity or quantification; rather, she recognized the need for qualitative inquiry to address the complex questions that one faces as a higher education administrator. Joan described staff meetings, conversations with students, focus groups, and other forms of interactions as serving as important forms of data that can aid the leader in making more holistic decisions than trying to limit data to quantitative measures such as electronic surveys, class attendance, or student grades. However, Joan's understanding of social science was often different than those of her superiors, as she pointed out that the expectations of what she could 'accomplish' in her role as a Senior Student Affairs Officer were often based in the faulty expectations by her superiors that she could predict or control student behavior. Expectations such as that hint at regimes of rationality that accept the notion of cause and effect in the realm of social science. These expectations also are indicative of a role as an SSAO that is both charged with governing others' behavior while simultaneously being governed as a leader by a dominant discourse.

Common sense. Joan demonstrated an awareness that appeared similar to a Foucauldian awareness of knowledge and power, and the various ways that these manifest as common sense practices. She used the Catholic church as a metaphor to describe how hierarchies are developed and maintained, describing the formal organization of the Catholic church and the roles that were designated for men as priests and women as nuns. She described how she questioned from a young age why women were not allowed to serve in the same manner that men were, and therefore, had different abilities to impact change from within the organization. One of Joan's

sisters became a nun in the Catholic church and another left the convent after several years. Observing her sisters' experiences with the church, while Joan was in middle school, complicated her understanding of how discourses establish and extend relations of power and social practices. In addition, Joan used her experiences with the church to highlight how she has always felt that she is a skeptic who is willing to challenge common sense. The selection of her response also highlights her own self-surveillance when she discussed that she learned how to act or present herself in certain situations:

From the beginning, I have questioned things that are supposed to be accepted, and that has gotten me in trouble. In my freshman year of high school, in a religious education class, one of the questions I asked was if there really was an Adam and Eve, or is that just a good story to tell us? What does the story mean? What does original sin mean to us as humans? I almost got kicked out of class for asking those questions. So, I already knew coming along that I was running up against roadblocks, and I learned really early to dodge them, and to be a certain way in some circumstances.

However, Joan also specified that it is not an either/or in regard to her relationship with the church. There are traditions that she cherishes and that have great meaning to her personally. So, she chose to accept certain things about the church and dismiss other parts in order to make sense of a discourse that she does not agree with fully; she related this to her experience as a leader within higher education. She said that this mindset of accepting certain things while still disagreeing with others has helped her work within a large organization by helping her to cope with practices with which she disagreed but felt that she could not change. However, she also was able to maintain a critical disposition where she would choose where she could push for change in practices in a manner that would not lead to her being removed from her position of leadership as an administrator. Joan could be understood as describing an awareness of the Foucauldian concept of governmentality in relation to her practice as an administrator, due to recognizing that her decisions were governed by others while she also governed others decisions.

In the following quote Joan described how trying to bring about change as an administrator varied in relation to the expectations under which she was selected as a leader:

There have absolutely been times when I was not hired by an administration to be a change agent, but when I was doing the job I realized that change was needed. There were other times where I was hired to be a change agent and to clean house. That is easier because you know what the administration wants, but it's also harder because you don't have staff on board so you can't be successful with them. Cultural change is the hardest thing to do. It is the most draining. You have to be both efficient and effective. It's all about personnel capital. It is a constant battle and you have to choose your battles carefully.

From an early point in her career Joan had to get used to other people overruling her decisions. She says that while she was bothered by this, particularly when she perceived the outcome as being one that was inequitable or inconsistent, she had to learn to accept that there were times where her decisions would be overruled. So, she referred to relations of power as existing in a specific way, as well as practices that extend such relations of power, and she recognized that there were practices (in this case decisions) that she had to adopt in order to adhere to the accepted way of practicing as an administrator. This is an example of her actions being surveilled as an administrator and therefore her own self-surveillance brought her future actions in line with the norm. Perhaps in response to the realization that she had to accept her decisions would be overruled, Joan said she strove to make decisions that were equitable and consistent. Equity and consistency became clear goals for her, and these guided her decision-making approach as a leader. Joan focused on identifying and understanding the goals that one has when taking action, and she believed that these goals must then guide one's decisions so as to strive for those larger values of consistency and equity. Further, Joan said that she always attempted to be clear with her intentions, and that as a leader she tried to describe how her intentions were goal-oriented. Her desire with this approach was to help those in her purview understand the intended purpose and thought processes of a decision.

Reflexive practice. Joan's description of decision making indicated a valuing of reflexive-practice; the decisions that have been made previously, as well as those that may be made in the future are viewed as being in relation to each other and are considered in the context of the institution's values. Therefore, the consequences of all of the decisions may be viewed as being connected. This is similar to the kind of value-based decision-making that Flyvbjerg (2004) argues are vital for *phronesis* to be possible. From Joan's experience, she came to understand that the impacts of decisions are fleeting due to a need to adjust for future changes in the culture which will inevitably alter future expectations.

Technical rationality. Joan discussed how she understood technical rationality and those administrators that may make decisions according to this form of rationality. She said that efficiency may be one of the driving values for those that take a technically rational approach to decision making. Joan also commented that some administrators may buy into the idea that their decisions should be made in a manner that most closely goes along with the, "system", because there is a trust in the discourse that the decisions that are in alignment with the status quo equate to doing the right thing. Joan said she does not consider herself to be a technically rational leader; rather, she finds herself being drawn to leaders who make decisions with a prioritization of context and values. She made the point that even if the motivation is not the same for leaders when making decisions there can still be very similar outcomes reached when different decision-making approaches are practiced. So, the outcomes of the decision may be the same from an approach that is technically rational and an approach that is *phronetic*. However, Joan still felt most connected to serving with leaders who were motivated by similar values, rationalities, and/or ideologies as her, and she viewed her approach as more often than not being a better approach for making decisions as a SSAO. Joan believed that all decisions are ethical in nature,

and she viewed the work she did as needing to be concerned with ethics because her work impacted people. However, Joan perceived her approach to decision making as not being indicative of the predominant approach to decision making, as she perceived many leaders making decisions through an approach that appears similar to technical rationality. She described her approach for making ethical decisions in the below quote, and how she believed that her approach differs from the predominant approach:

People are not stepping off the cliff of uncertainty and figuring it out as they go. Every action cannot determine a reaction. In student affairs you have to be nimble, and as a Senior Student Affairs Officer you cannot be prescriptive. Things often do not occur the way you think they will occur. In some ways, I'm surprised I'm saying this, but it's about making decisions that are the best in this specific time and this place. There are situational ethics. I still try to use consistent and equitable as a framework to guide those decisions though.

Techne and episteme. Despite her critique of technically rational approaches to leadership, Joan did not dismiss the value of technical competence in leaders; rather, she believed that competency in knowledge and skill are vital, along with sound judgement developed through experience. Yet, even in the most rule-bound types of work Joan thought there is still a need for practical wisdom to be the deciding factor in decision-making, because purely formulaic or technical decision-making approaches cannot always consider ethical consequence—as understood through the moral philosophy of virtue ethics. Even in areas that can ethically operate under technical rationality the majority of the time, due to the defined nature of the majority of the processes of their work (e.g. financial aid), there are still going to be times and unpredictable circumstances that call for a more nuanced approach to decision-making that Joan believed cannot be offered through technical rationality. She provided an example of a natural disaster occurring that leads to students having to unexpectedly take time off from school, and she described how the federal government accounts for such unforeseeable

circumstances by allowing for the, “professional judgement,” of the administrator to rule above all other criteria when making a decision about a student’s financial aid. Joan specified that she does not think that using professional judgement is an easy thing to do, but it is necessary part of serving in such a position of leadership. Further, she believed that if one does not understand when professional judgement is necessary or how to practice professional judgement, then one is ill-equipped to serve as a leader for others. She expanded on this concept in the following quote:

People lean back on an ‘a’ + ‘b’ frameworks because they want predetermined answers. I find that more frequently, and that is very discouraging. I’ve found that more people are not able to, “think in the grey”, is what I call it. They are unable to see the nuance of a situation because they rely on that mathematical type of framework.

Making *phronetic* decisions. Joan said that she is not driven by valuing efficiency as her priority value, rather she is driven by a mixture of values. She described technically rational leaders as valuing efficiency as their top priority, and she disagreed with this approach because it can mean that the leader can make decisions that are actually not what is needed at the time, according to situational ethics. Joan believed that every decision does not result in either/or consequences, but that each decision does have ethical consequence. In the following quote Joan identified herself as a social scientist, and she described how that impacts the way that she gathers information to make a decision:

I think that technical expertise is very important, and there are reasons to put stock in formulas and data, as well as making sure that you pay attention to what you can collect information about. I mean let's get real, this is social science stuff. It's never going to be hardcore, it's trend data, and it's data about people's behavior. So, at best our technical rationality is going to be based on the best guess we have, given these patterns of information. I mean that's the way...as a social scientist for many years (*laughter*)...that's the way I look at it, and I think that's a truism. That is versus hard data that a scientist who has more concrete results; they can enable that kind of data. We can't as social scientists.

In one example she discussed the ethical consequences of increasing the number of students enrolled in a college when the support services (tutoring, disability services, etc.) have not yet

increased to meet the needs of the growing population, or have not yet evolved to assist students in ways that are then needed by the new students. So, the consequences are that the institution is not yet equipped to be of service to the students in a way that administrators should recognize as necessary to serve their community in an excellent manner. Joan shared experiences in which she recognized and admitted that she was previously part of a higher education community that made possible these changes to admissions standards while not adequately adjusting various student services as well, and she witnessed what that meant as she saw persistence and retention rates drop in relation to those decisions. By discussing this experience and asking what the consequences of those decisions were, out of concern for ethics, Joan demonstrated similarities in the kind of reflexivity that is indicative of *phronetic* leadership. Joan's reflexivity addressed questions about who loses from a decision, to what end, and what should and/or can be done about it to make the situation more equitable in the future. I argue that any one administrator cannot control the larger norms and rationalities that shape practices within education; however, it is still vital for an administrator to be reflexive in their practice so as to strive for ethical decisions in the future.

In relation to the example of lowering admissions standards to increase access to a college without also increasing the scale and scope of services offered to students Joan described the difficulties that are faced by an administrator when the complexities of their work change. These complexities (or practical considerations) thereby alter the possible actions that can be taken by the leader. These changes bring upon new ethical dilemmas that must be addressed by the leader. Joan described the responsibility she believed she had to strive for truthfulness in what is promised and what can be delivered or offered to students. This truthfulness in messaging was an ethical concern for Joan. She labeled this concept as the, "before-market

promise,” and she related this to valuing and being committed to public trust. Joan described her understanding of education as being different than an outcomes-based product delivery, or quantifiable measure, because she describes education and human development as being, “ongoing, messy, and complex”. Therefore, aligning one’s efforts with the, “before-market promise,” is full of unique challenges when attempting to match-up the, “after-market delivery,” in higher education.

Joan discussed a framework that she has developed to use as a lens to look at her role in her work. She utilized this framework in order to help account for what she called, “internal character flaws and beliefs,” when developing a contextual framework for a given scenario or decision. The three areas that she considered when developing a contextual framework were communication, expectations, and culture/values. Joan’s discussion of this framework demonstrated a commitment to being a leader who is reflexive, in order to improve when making future decisions. This is part of the process of developing practical wisdom, because the development of practical wisdom does not come without reflexive practice. It is this reflexive practice that aids one in considering one’s thought processes, the values that informed a decision, and the rationality that helps makes certain approaches appear as common sense. Joan described her understanding of communication as never being able to achieve an objective end, which I think demonstrates a truthful assessment of communication that is not often openly discussed by leaders. This is vital to consider in relationship to her leadership approach, as it demonstrates an ongoing commitment to improving her own communication practices, rather than falsely assuming that her communication skills can no longer be honed or that the manner in which she communicated should stay consistent regardless of context.

Joan discussed that as a higher education leader one is often operating from a reactive stance; however, she believed that one should aim to be proactive, which requires taking time to practice care with decisions. She believed that this approach is vital to make the best decisions. Joan defined the best decisions as those that are made in a manner that considers various consequences and are nested in a slower kind of thinking process—she labeled this as, “thinking in the grey.” While she said that the end decisions may be the same decision that would have been determined through a reactive approach, for Joan, this does not change the importance of practicing such a careful process for decision-making. I believe that this assessment aligns with my description of a *phronetic* approach to decision-making in the sense that while a technical approach to decision-making is often lauded as bringing about greater efficiency in decision-making, and therefore being ideal for times when reactive decisions are necessary, leaders who take a *phronetic* approach to decision-making are actually incorporating the skills and knowledge that inform such technical approaches. However, the *phronetic* approach to decision-making actually extends the leader’s considerations beyond the scope of the technical approach by incorporating the character dispositions of the leader into the decision-making process, and therefore is an approach that can consider greater ethical complexities which makes possible an ethical caring for one’s community.

Being devalued as a leader. Joan described her awareness of problems that she saw in the profession that she believed existed regardless of higher education institution, which I believe supports the notion of a dominant form of rationality existing across institutional type, location, etc. The approach that Joan took as a leader was one that she began to feel was incompatible with the dominant discourse in higher education. She viewed this incompatibility as decreasing the positive impact she could have through her approach to leadership, as she viewed her

leadership approach as no longer holding as much value when viewed through the lens of the dominant discourse. In her description of her leadership approach that was devalued, Joan again returned to her focus on the importance of fundamentals; I think her understanding of fundamentals relates strongly to an Aristotelian understanding of the importance of habits for the development of the virtuous character dispositions of a leader. Joan communicated a commitment to such habits as being necessary for the long-term sustainment of a higher education institution, and she witnessed a shift away from valuing leaders who focus on developing and enhancing fundamentals. Therefore, she saw the development of such fundamentals, in younger professionals, as decreasing in practice. Instead, Joan perceived a different kind of leader as being valued: a leader who can appear successful immediately by developing, “flashy,” programs or delivering outcomes that have quantitative measures yet may make no meaningful impact on students according to the mission of the institution. This trend concerned Joan, as the consequence is that the focus is taken away from what could be called, “behind-the-scenes fundamentals,” that she views as being the responsibility of a leader who is of service to the community; she addresses this in the following quote:

If service is our mission, then we have to focus on being servant leaders. However, too many people want to be flashy leaders and not true servant leaders for students and their staff. The notion of the need for servant leadership goes back to public-trust, and I think it is probably viewed as an old-fashioned or out-of-date notion of leadership by many people. Servant leadership doesn't hit innovator standards and other things that I know institutions are trying to use to differentiate from the masses. However, in my view of the world, which is informed through my experiences, public trust is what matters.

Some of what Joan discussed could be understood as new challenges faced by higher education leaders as access to college has increased, as identity politics have become more complex, and as competition between higher education institutions has increased, which can be linked to the strain of financial resources as publicly appropriated budgets shrink for public

higher education institutions. Joan questioned how truthful the assessment is between what is promised to students, or what students expect of an institution, and what can actually be practically provided by an institution with limited resources. This relates back to Joan's notion of the before-market promise and after-market delivery. Joan shared that she believed that it is inevitable that a group or groups of constituents will be disappointed with any decisions that are made by a leader. This is a reality that one must accept as always being present.

Joan communicated that she has seen many leaders remain concerned about public perception as a priority when making decisions; she thought this is due to the leaders believing that they may lose their job if they ignore the public perception of decisions. This is not a surprise to me, but I would suggest viewing such decisions through the Aristotelian lens of excess and deficiency of vice and virtue of one's actions when making a decision. An action that is brash could easily contribute to a leader being fired, but a cowardly action could also lead to a leader being fired due to the public perception that one is not willing to take necessary actions. This is a difficult space for a leader, and I argue that there are newer complexities that can make the decision appear more difficult (i.e., a demand for more immediate forms of communication of statements regarding a situation, nuanced language that continually evolves regarding identities, etc.).

Shifting contexts. As an example of the difficult decisions she faced as a leader, who was considering multiple perceptions, Joan discussed her experience with student protests. She described the Black Lives Matter movement at her most recent institution, and she made a decision to demonstrate support for the student protest at the institution. She said that she carefully considered her participation, and she decided it was important for her to demonstrate support for the students and the staff in student affairs that were supporting those students. She

recognized that her behavior would be interpreted as an example for the larger community, and this motivated her and also concerned her as it related to possible perceptions. Ultimately, she decided that she would participate in a manner that would limit the opportunity for having her intentions misrepresented through any form of media. She decided to participate in the protest by weighing her goals, and she put the ends and means in conversation when deciding how to present herself and how to act during the protest. In the below quote, Joan's response relates to the Foucauldian notion of surveillance and self-surveillance is again evident in the thought process that Joan discussed in relation to her participation in the protest:

I made a decision, and it was a hard decision, but I made a decision. It was a small decision in many ways, but I went down and stood with the students for an hour out in the snow. I took a sign and hung it around my neck, but I didn't have a sign that said Black Lives Matter. I thought through what happens if someone takes a picture of this and I'm in the student newspaper, how will that be perceived? So, I had a sign that said peace around the world, because who can protest that? I thanked the student leaders, but I did not answer questions from others walking by. I stood silently, and it was a beautiful protest! One of the most beautiful protests I've been a part of.

As an assistant or associate vice president, as well as a vice president, Joan approached communication with her staff with the intention of getting a sense of what was going on in the various parts of campus. She asked for input from the leaders in her purview, as she believed this helped her have a broader sense of context when making decisions. She also communicated that she did not attempt to make every decision, but rather she often wanted her supervisees to make decisions, as she thought they had a better understanding of the context surrounding the decision and how staff and students might be impacted by a decision. Further, Joan described how she attempted to help others improve their decision-making approaches by granting them the space and opportunities to make most of their decisions. There were other decisions that she attempted to let the group of leaders in her purview make together, because she thought more minds would often examine a decision more thoroughly than one. Joan said that she tried to be as transparent

as possible with decisions by providing information to those in her purview regarding the decision. She did this partly to help alleviate the various perceptions that would form regarding a decision in the absence of information. However, Joan also said that as a leader one can never please everyone, and that there are also times when information cannot be shared about a decision due to concerns related to confidentiality, legality, and safety.

Character dispositions. Joan talked about the surprise she had with what she viewed as a lack of ethics, or lack of ethical awareness in younger people that she was mentoring and supervising. Largely she equated this to professionals who would lie and or steal and then rationalize their behaviors as being okay, because they knew other professionals who did a similar thing. I would refer to this as an underdevelopment of character, or having character dispositions that are incompatible with the requirements of a leader. Joan also discussed the differences in the norms of character dispositions that she perceived, depending on the institution, as she said that there was a level of respect for experience at some institutions and not others. She did not have the problem with individuals lying to her at one institution, as part of the norms of that institution were to be truthful and take ownership for one's mistakes, as opposed to trying to hide one's mistakes by lying. Joan viewed student affairs professionals as having to be aware that their actions serve as examples for students regarding what is acceptable behavior within the university community. So, she described her responsibility as needing to not only set an example for students but also for all staff within the division; in addition, she held individuals accountable to the standards of behavior for the community. She did this because if she overlooked inappropriate behaviors that broke norms then other staff members would take note of her lack of action as a leader. This relates strongly to my discussion of the Senior Student

Affairs Officer as a position that is a governor of behavior, while also having their own behavior governed simply by holding the position.

Serving students. Joan discussed her focus on risk assessment as a leader, and how she always tried to be careful when making decisions, so as to assess the risks related to financial and human capital concerns. Further, Joan tried to include experts to assess risk from a legal and a financial standpoint. This demonstrates a respect and awareness of specialized skill and knowledge that other professionals had that she did not. This also demonstrated a willingness to include others in decision making in order to account for blind spots. Joan expected her staff to always try to think three steps ahead in whatever they were doing. She did not think that one can think much further than three steps ahead. However, thinking three steps ahead will help one be prepared for what may come, or the consequences that may be associated with certain decisions. Joan viewed this as an approach that can help prevent making basic mistakes, and she also was taught by a former boss to always focus on the goal, objective, the purpose, the question, and the mission when making any decision. She described how she viewed many problems as being associated with leaders not thinking about their work and problems in such a way, and therefore losing focus on the original goal. She believed the goal is what keeps the leader on track with their actions and their decisions; she described her awareness of students when making decisions in the below quote:

Despite losing contact with students the higher up the ladder I moved in my positions, I never felt like I quit working for students. I always thought that I served them! It was for them that I did the work that I did. Even when I didn't see them, even when I was unfortunately telling them they couldn't come back to school, even when I was helping them out of major difficulties, or even when I couldn't help them because they had messed things up themselves, or I couldn't help them because they were resource poor, or couldn't help them for whatever reason, I always felt like they were our primary concern and we are servant to them.

With an admitted alignment with Aristotle's virtue ethics, Joan discussed how she developed a daily mantra of always trying to improve, focusing on how to improve her behavior, her decisions, etc. She then tied this value of focusing on constant improvement as something that she learned through the way she was raised, through her Catholic education, and she related it to Aristotle's view of the human condition. She believed that leadership is about improving the human condition, focusing on a community, and being aware of ethics. Joan further elaborated on how she focused on, "teaching and preaching," by always focusing on being better, on defining what better means in a given situation, and always striving to be better. She recognized that her constant focus on this concept of 'better' was likely a reason that she may not have been popular at times as a leader, because she was constantly pushing for those in her purview to improve and not accept the status quo.

Middle ground. Joan described the challenges and struggles that are faced by a Senior Student Affairs Officer when faced with new situations that seem to spill over to a college campus and are part of larger societal events or movements. The Senior Student Affairs Officer is often tasked with dealing with these situations (such as student protests), both in addressing them publicly, but also in being asked at the cabinet level to predict student behavior or assess the risk that is involved with various decisions. What Joan communicated is that one can never be fully prepared, by experience, to deal with such situations; in fact, what one often has to do is go through the situation in order to learn from it. Joan believed that no matter what the Senior Student Affairs Officer does in such situations, it is inevitable that their decisions will come under scrutiny from a legal standpoint, which brings a weight to such decisions. Joan again stressed that these situations are difficult, and that there is no easy answer to be found; regardless of level of experience, the decisions will still be difficult, and the experience of making the

decisions will be a struggle. Joan referred to the Senior Student Affairs Officer as the broadest generalist of all cabinet positions at a university, and part of her description is nested in the expectations on the Senior Student affairs Officer that she described as “fierce.” This highlights the incredible amount of stress that one faces when attempting to lead as an SSAO. Joan suggested that a Senior Student Affairs Officer should focus on goals, mission, and purpose to ground and inform every decision, and that the SSAOs that she has seen as being most successful over a period of time are those who have a strong relationship built on trust and respect with their university president. She said that this approach, along with striving to keep one’s decisions in the “middle of the road” provides the greatest likelihood that the institution and division will be sustainable and therefore be able to maintain services that can continue to serve students, while likely being able to respond to unforeseeable future challenges. This demonstrates a commitment to an Aristotelian notion of striving for the virtuous mean in one’s actions. Joan described the meaning she gained when reflecting on her career through the following quote:

I was blessed to have a wonderful career. It doesn’t mean I didn’t work hard; it doesn’t mean there weren’t issues that I consider failures or rejections along the way, but there were absolutely incredible things I have been able to do—the fun things and the difficult things. I just look at the successes of many of the students I have been able to work with, and I think I was just really lucky to be in a place where I could just give a little assistance so they could dig into their best self.

New challenges. Joan believes that the context of the struggles that are faced by Senior Student Affairs Officers have changed rapidly in the past 15 to 20 years. She was not sure what all of these changes will mean, but she knew that they mean something, and she thought that leaders must be aware of these changes and adjust accordingly. She questioned if anyone has the practical wisdom to know how to deal with the shifting expectations placed on SSAOs, particularly as it relates to new challenges that come with increased access to college. Some of these challenges include expectations to provide specialized services for students based on

identity categories while funding for divisions of student affairs continue to decrease (e.g. ‘do more with less’). An inevitable weakness of practical wisdom that Joan identified is that new problems and complexities will be faced by leaders that fall outside their past lived experience, and so an approach must be taken that is untested. This inevitably brings about challenges and a struggle for the individual leaders; this seems to me to be an inevitable part of serving as a leader in a community where values and priorities shift. However, in the below quote, Joan brought up an important and rich discussion of the continuing struggle of making complex decisions as a leader who seeks the middle road in their decisions:

There was a great deal of stress involved with trying to straddle both sides of the fence, and always having to fight for things that didn’t seem to yield enough for my people (staff). After a while, I got tired of having to defend why we needed to do something for students, why we needed to do something for staff, because some of those arguments were ones that I shouldn’t have had to make; they should have been completely understandable why we should focus in those areas (fundamental areas) rather than on flashy programs that don’t actually meet the mission.

While Joan’s experience as an SSAO was rewarding and fulfilling, it also became increasingly difficult for her to face the continual struggle of realizing that her approach to leadership was increasingly devalued as not focusing on the priorities of the dominant discourse.

Conclusion

Overall, I think that Joan’s views and values align with my understanding of *phronetic* leadership. Her views of the need for competence in knowledge and skills, as well as the need to develop one’s character through professional experience, resemble with the way in which I understand *phronetic* leadership. Further, Joan was clear that codified ethics have a place, and are needed, such as having a student code of conduct. However, Joan does not view codified ethics as ever being able to replace the need for a wise leader to make decisions within the context of a community. Instead, the role of codified ethics, for students and professionals, is to

serve as a way to communicate standards of behavior and to establish the norms of responsibility one has as a member of a community. Codified ethics are complementary to the wise leader but cannot replace the dynamic decision-making abilities of a *phronetic* leader who can respond to unforeseeable challenges and questions while incorporating an awareness of an institution's mission and values. Joan's description of the process of becoming a leader and developing as a leader should be understood as a continual process of fundamental habits that are complemented by the standards of a profession and community, but also kept in check through constant comparative reflection on one's own values. She described this process of becoming a leader in the following quote:

The process of becoming the kind of leader I think one should be involves several things. Go get the best training you can through a doctorate degree, if you want to be a Senior Student Affairs Officer. Learn everything you can from the wisdom of all of your colleagues and your mentors, because they already have some of that practical wisdom that you don't! You also have to do the formal part, and look at the standards of the profession, and if you don't believe in those, then you have to ask yourself why you are in the profession. You have to consider what you have not yet been exposed to through experience, and that should lead you to go to conferences to continue to learn from others. And then, you juxtapose all of that with your own knowledge, the changing environment, your own ethics, morals, and values—which I think you should constantly throw on a wall and examine—and you make sure your decisions and the way that you lead is right; right being whatever right means for that time, place, and institution.

NARRATIVE FINDINGS – PARTICIPANT 2: JACOB

Jacob's Background

Jacob is a current Senior Student Affairs Officer who has worked at various types of higher education institutions across the country. His experiences have provided him a diverse and broad exposure to various administrative practices across institutional types. Jacob has worked at public four-year institutions, private four-year institutions, religiously affiliated institutions, and community colleges. He has served as a Senior Student Affairs Officer at two different institutions, including the institution where he currently serves. Jacob was not very familiar with Aristotle's virtue ethics, although he did have an understanding of some Foucauldian concepts related to knowledge, power, governmentality, and surveillance; this was because he studied some of Foucault's work and he incorporated Foucauldian concepts in his own dissertation; Jacob's familiarity with Foucauldian concepts was apparent in his ability to critique how the dominant discourse manifests in concrete practices that appear as common sense. Jacob demonstrated a commitment to acting virtuously which he described as not aligning with a simplistic (black and white) understanding of being moral or immoral.

Educational background. Jacob holds a doctorate of education degree, a master of science in educational administration and policy studies, a master of arts in English degree, a Bachelor of Arts in English degree, and an associate of arts degree in liberal arts.

Professional experience. Jacob has extensive administrative experience (20 years) at eight higher education institutions, which includes experience at private religiously affiliated non-comprehensive, public comprehensive, private non-sectarian comprehensive, and public non-comprehensive institutions. His foundational professional experience is in residential life which he gained before holding executive level roles in student affairs. Jacob has served as a Senior Student Affairs Officer for roughly seven years. His experience includes reorganizing divisions of student affairs, conducting strategic planning and assessment efforts, and developing staff and student professional competency curriculum. Jacob has skills in developing a strategic vision, strategic planning, assessment of outcomes, and improving the effectiveness of services offered for students.

Teaching experience. Jacob has served as adjunct professor or part-time faculty member for roughly six years, for both undergraduate and graduate courses.

Professional service. Jacob has extensive professional association involvement, which includes serving on voluntary boards, submitting articles that were published, and presenting during conferences.

Jacob's Narrative

Jacob currently serves as a Senior Student Affairs Officers for a public community college. Jacob was born in the late-1970s. He described his family as being of poor socioeconomic status, and he believes that this status posed a challenge for him as it related to stability in the household. However, he also believes that his background exposed him to the, “good, bad, and the ugly of life,” which he credits with an empathetic worldview pertaining to the diversity of challenges encountered by college students. While Jacob's family life was unstructured, from the standpoint of a lack of rules, he found structure by attending the Catholic

church, as well as through the structure of the public schools he attended. He referred to both the church and school as, “respites” from the challenges he faced in his home; his parents were divorced, and he lived with his mother. However, he viewed his mother as a parent that could not provide a consistently stable and safe environment. Jacob’s belief in the need and purpose of organizations, such as church and school, to provide safety, security, and stability can be understood as being informed by his lived experience. Jacob chose to no longer attend church when he was in his thirties, due to recognizing a difference in the church’s values and his own. However, he credited the church with providing a stable environment for him as a child, as well as for providing structure for his development of character dispositions.

In addition to the church and school, Jacob shared that his maternal grandparents were members of his family that were able to provide a structured environment for him, as they had expectations regarding manners and how he acted when he was with them. While they were strict with their expectations and feedback, they also demonstrated unconditional love for Jacob no matter what. To an extent, Jacob’s grandparents were key family figures in raising him and teaching him lessons about how to love others, act virtuously, and stay focused on developing and achieving goals. He pointed out that when he was with his grandparents, the rules were different, as were the norms within their household—when compared to lack of rules in his mother’s household. While he had to shift back and forth between both environments, he found that his dispositions and behaviors often aligned more closely with the expectations of his grandparents than those of his mother. Even when he was not under the surveillance of his grandparents, Jacob found that he enjoyed living in a way that would have granted positive reinforcement from his grandparents.

Courage. From his point of view, Jacob believed that his concern with what is right or wrong shifted from the time he was a child to when he was an adult. He remembered his primary concern as a child as being to care for himself and that he was not as concerned for caring for others. Specifically, he discussed feeling, “cowardly,” when he was a kid. He felt cowardly when he would act in an inauthentic way in the hope that he would not be outed as being gay; this included hurling insults, such as “faggot,” at other children with his friends. He says that he recognized these actions were wrong at the time, but he continued them out of fear of being ostracized by his friends, and he said that acting in this way made him feel depressed at the injustice he witnessed and in which he participated in perpetuating. He says that this experience of feeling cowardly has stayed with him, and that it continues to serve as motivation to live his life in a more socially just and brave manner. Due to reflecting on such experiences, he now feels more comfortable speaking up and taking action when he views it is necessary to stand up against something that he views as an injustice; it is partly due to this ability to more closely align his actions with his values that he feels more fulfilled in his life.

Lived experience. Jacob said that he thinks about how the experiences he has gained are unique to anyone else’s experiences, as well as what he has learned from those experiences. Those experiences give him pause to think through what has happened to lead to an action or inaction at times, as well as how he felt about the choices that informed such a decision. He said he considers how that experience informed him, developed him, or perhaps made him act differently in the future. A lot of the changes in how he acts are based on the outcomes of his past actions, as well as how others react to such actions. This summarizes Jacob’s understanding of the development of his own ethics and character. When discussing the moral philosophy of utilitarian ethics, Jacob bluntly stated that he rejects this understanding of ethics, and thereby

demonstrated a greater agreement with my critique of the weaknesses of this moral philosophy, when compared with virtue ethics. Jacob said that when he thinks about how people acquire their values he often hears people talk about others as being either moral or immoral, or that others are described as having good values or as having bad values. Jacob observed this manifesting in the debate around ethics when individuals or groups of people are automatically determined to be immoral or moral due to an identity. Jacob rejected this view of ethics as being too simplistic, and he does not think it is that easy to define. He said he largely agreed with the form of Aristotelian virtue ethics as I described them to him. He said that when he hears others talk about values in a simplistic way he always questions who gets to decide that there is a consensus around what is defined as immoral, moral, bad, or good. What Jacob said he thinks about instead is that if one practices habits these eventually form principles from which one operates, and in fact the principles by which one operates become second nature where you do not even realize they are at work when acting. This description that Jacob provides is similar to an Aristotelian development of honing character dispositions through habituation and experience.

Context and the middle ground. Jacob did not think enough people consider the importance of context when making decisions, rather they seek to understand the world through the lens of universal truths. He addressed this view in the following quote:

It's fascinating how the world, society, human development, let alone student development, technological advancements, perceptions of others—all of these things come back to this idea of ethics. It brings you back to this place of the contextual impact on decision-making. Yet, so many people still today don't think about the importance of context on anything.

Along these same lines, Jacob thought that there are ethical consequences to not considering context when making decisions. Part of this, he thought, relates to people not being able to find the “middle ground” when making decisions. Rather, he often sees people focusing only on

student development theories or only focusing on legal ramifications when making decisions, and he viewed this as contributing to overly simplified black and white thinking. He viewed these approaches as extreme approaches that often forget that decisions should be made in the interest of students, and that focus is lost through such forms of thinking about decisions. Jacob viewed this approach to decision making as losing focus on the “moral middle ground” because despite saying that students are the people that should be served, the students are the people who are actually being adversely impacted by such a non-contextual approach to decision making.

Motivation to serve. Student services were identified by Jacob as having a positive impact on him when he was a college student; the personal benefit he realized through these services continues to motivate him to work in student affairs in order to “pay it forward” through his work as an administrator in student affairs. From a young age Jacob was aware of the difference in his sexual orientation when compared to his peers, and he did not come out as gay to family or friends until he was in college. Throughout grade school and high school Jacob masked his sexual orientation, as he recognized that he would be perceived as breaking social norms—thereby demonstrating behaviors and thinking that support the Foucauldian notion of governmentality that lends to self-surveillance by Jacob of his actions. However, the older he got the more he began to recognize that he was not happy acting in ways that were counter to how he identified; he credited the student services he was able to utilize in college as helping him develop confidence through participating in various groups and then serving in student leadership roles. These student leadership roles allowed him to learn through experience and develop his character in ways that he could not when he was focused on masking part of his identity. Jacob began to recognize what a life of flourishing could feel like, and he now dedicates

his focus to removing barriers for college students who are unable to flourish due to a variety of barriers.

While Jacob recognized that there are possible professional consequences for speaking up for individuals or groups of certain marginalized identities, when he considers the consequences he may face when deciding to act in such a way he always reminds himself of why he does the work that he does (i.e. his values and purpose), and that ‘why’ helps him determine when and how to act. This demonstrated that Jacob is values-aware and that he attempts to make decisions that are informed by a consideration of values. While Jacob focuses on removing barriers to students’ success, he was careful to point out that, “you can’t be all things to all people all the time in all places”. This is a perspective that demonstrates a viewpoint that is similar to a *phronetic* consideration of what can be practically accomplished within a given time and place, as well as Foucault’s rejection of seeking universal outcomes through one’s actions as a leader. Jacob’s description of his approach to leadership is that he tries to do the right things, within the context of a situation, and within his sphere of influence; this approach to leadership appears similar to an Aristotelian valuing of practical wisdom and virtue ethics in which what is right is determined by a wise leader who must apply judgement gained through experience to determine the best course of action or inaction.

Relations of power and regimes of rationality. Jacob demonstrated a recognition of relations of power as always being present in his work, as he described experiences in which his desired decision was overruled by a superior and he was required to make a decision with which he disagreed. Jacob used the metaphor of fighting battles to describe his approach to making a decision in such situations. When deciding whether to abide by the overruling of his superiors or ignore their directions Jacob talked about deciding whether the decision was one that was “worth

dying on a hill for” because there are times he was aware he would be fired if he disobeyed a directive. He said he has shared the same metaphor of dying on a hill with many of his staff and mentees because it can be very difficult to feel as if you are carrying out an unjust decision with which you disagree. While he said that he cannot always do what he believes needs to be done, what he tries to do is to find ways to help students in other ways in the future that he views as helping to amend the injustice.

Jacob believed that individual Senior Student Affairs Officers can still make an ethical impact through their decisions, as long as they are willing to be courageous. He expressed that he thinks that if you are only willing to “go with the flow,” then the appropriate character disposition to be courageous is not present for that specific leader. Jacob said that he thinks it is easy to “do the right thing” when you always keep students in mind as your first priority. He specified that this does not mean you can do the right thing for everyone, but it means that in general you are considering the right things (e.g. values) when making decisions. To learn from your experiences takes time, and Jacob thinks it is important for an administrator to learn from their experiences in order to be able to then build student programs and resources in a way that may reduce barriers. While Jacob thinks that it is easy to do the right thing, he also discussed the difficulties that he faces in his job, particularly as it relates to issues of governmentality and the dominance of technical rationality; he viewed technical rationality as impacting the kinds of educational practices that are valued or devalued, and thereby the practices that accepted as the common sense practices. In the following quote Jacob described his summary of the larger discourse that he views as shaping the way in which higher education administrators practice and approach decisions:

I think the emphasis on a liberal arts education has diminished for many reasons, including that there are stricter accountability measures from the federal government. After all, the federal government won't just provide financial aid for exploration, and taxpayers want to know that education is an actual investment that has a return. Employers want skills not philosophers. We haven't embraced the idea of what a liberal arts education can bring to concepts around critical thinking, leadership, and humanity. I would say those are lost in a world where we want more welders than wisdom.

Critical thinking was described by Jacob as a process that is in the higher level on the spectrum of thought and rationality. While certain ideas can be commonly agreed upon and articulated by the majority of people, Jacob defined critical thinking as a personalized event for the critical thinker to such common sense ideas and examine them differently; he expressed a belief that such an approach to critical thinking can lead one to formulate judgments and arguments that may be counter to what is commonly accepted. Jacob's valuing of critical thinking indicated a willingness to challenge the status quo, as well as a likely awareness that regimes of rationality can manifest in concrete ways, such as in administrative practices in higher education.

In relation to Jacob's description of some of the challenges he faced in higher education administration, he also discussed a discourse of competition which he labeled as an "arms-race in higher education." According to Jacob, this competitive mindset falsely pits higher education institutions against one another. He has experienced an "arms-race," and he did not agree that public higher education institutions must or should view competition as necessary. He recognized the difference in institutional missions that he believes should make it apparent that the institutional competition is an artificial construct. If administrators at institutions are focused on serving their actual institutional missions and how they are supposed to be of service, according to those missions, he thinks it then becomes obvious that there is not a need for the kind of competition that is widely accepted. However, Jacob also admitted that the larger

discourse of competition has impacted him at times, and he has been guilty of having his own administrative practices align with the discourse. He asserted,

I do believe that missions change across institution types, such as for community colleges and historically black colleges and universities. We are complicit, even me, in perpetuating the idea of a better institution type or that there is a scarcity of resources. For example, I believe that a community college's open access mission makes it the best place for a certain type of student, and I would absolutely give lip service to that argument. Although, it may very well be that I could be holding someone back by advocating such an argument.

In addition to Jacob's critique of the discourse of competition between institutions, he believed that the things that are the most effective educational practices are often not valued because they are not quantitatively measurable and are therefore these effective educational practices are not seen as helping increase the competitiveness of an institution because becoming more competitive as an institution becomes the priority value of the dominant discourse and is therefore the lens through which practices are evaluated. He evaluated the usual focus by professionals as being "silly" because what is prioritized is what can be measured even though what is measured may not be the most important. So, rather than prioritizing one's time and focus on what is most important, or best, for students, the focus is on what can be measured. However, if truthfully considering how one's practices actually could better meet the mission and goals of serving students, it may become apparent that one could invest their time in efforts in ways that are far more effective. Jacob did not think that assessing one's work and having goals in mind are unimportant, instead he has attempted to critique the uncritical reasons that are often used to validate one's work as being meaningful and effective. He described his understanding,

You get into talking about outcomes and goals and benchmarks and assessment and reporting and you know all those buzzwords and you mean them for real reasons, but you recognize that there needs to be plans that are based in strategy and there needs to be some way to assess those plans to know if you're doing the right thing or not. Are we investing in the right things? So, I'm always going to say there is a time and a place for strategic planning and developing goals and objectives, and doing proper assessment. The problem is the best laid plans of mice and men of course don't amount to what you ever really can get sometimes out of just pure happenstance.

Qualitative understanding. In relation to Jacob's critique of what is evaluated as being valuable or meaningful work, he shared his own experience as a college student; he struggled academically his freshman year and then earned all 'A's after transferring before his sophomore year. Using this experience, he challenged how higher education administrators often think of what it means for students to be successful, or how administrators define their work as having a successful impact. Jacob said what could not be quantified during his freshman year was the personal development he had in building his confidence and development of interpersonal relationship. Yet, he posited that he would likely be evaluated very differently by both colleges as having been a success or a failure during his year at either institution during his freshman and sophomore years in college. Yet, he knows that his experience at both institutions cannot be understood through such a binary definition of successful versus unsuccessful. Instead, Jacob said that it depends on how success is defined or understood. He did not think that care is often taken to consider the vast ways in which student success can be defined when the value of student affairs work is assessed.

Jacob is concerned that many administrators do not value non-graded indicators of success; this can be attributed to a rationality that is focused on the production of quantifiable data that can be compared to the rest of the student body. According to a Foucauldian understanding of governmentality, this desire to quantify to a statistical mean is meant to surveil and therefore normalize the behaviors of students. A student's success is measured through

statistical comparison, and the example Jacob described as pivotal experiences in college are not measured statistically; therefore, the value of the practices that may have supported such pivotal experiences do not find their way to the consciousness of administrators when evaluating the decisions that have been made to support the student experience. Jacob reflected on how he may have been evaluated as a student when he was in college,

I'm considered a failure if you think about how we think about our students and what we are trying to do. Nobody is trying to put value on the fact that for the first time I knew what it felt like to be in love with somebody that was of the same sex and that I started to maybe learn that it was okay to be gay, that there was more to this thing than I thought in high school. I learned some really valuable life lessons about friendship and family in that freshman year. So, there are some major life lessons that I can anecdotally share with you, but how do you quantify that?

Making *phronetic* decisions. Strategic plans and learning outcomes developed for assessments, according to Jacob, are not to be used as pre-developed instructions for every action that one must take in the future. Instead, he thinks that these are simply guides that can help keep decisions focused on goals as one continues to make decisions in the future. Through this insight, Jacob displayed an awareness that everything cannot be predicted, and therefore a Senior Student Affairs Officer must be nimble with decisions that fall outside the strategic plan. Jacob also described the reality of having to strategically 'prove' that one's work is making an impact through the officially accepted methods that produce standardized measures of success; these are the methods that align with the official knowledge of what it means for a student to demonstrate growth and development. So, I interpret this as a double-move of implementing such quantitative measures in order to appease those seeking measures of accountability, while also recognizing that these measures will not give the *phronetic* leader the kind of insight they may desire to evaluate the efforts of the staff within their division. Jacob's questioning of the predictive capabilities of many accepted forms of assessment in higher education relates to the critique of

utilizing naturalistic approaches to inquiry in the social sciences. He discussed this in the following quote:

It's fascinating that decisions get caught up in the bureaucracy that ultimately loses sight of why we were doing something to begin with. When we're so worried about surveys and assessments, and things of that nature, we lose sight of what were we trying to build to begin with.

Jacob challenged the common sense understanding and use of the terms “efficient” and “effective,” and he also discussed his view that these terms are indicative of a form of rationality that is pervasive in higher education administration. Jacob said that he views these terms as commonly being understood as interchangeable, and he did not think that the distinctions between these terms is often considered critically. He believed that if efficiency and effectiveness are understood as one concept and then used to determine priorities, regardless of the situation, that there are likely problematic ethical consequences. He specifically highlighted the importance of considering context when evaluating if something is effective because efficiency alone should not determine if something is effective. Jacob argued that the only thing that makes anything positive, according to any value, label, or assessment, is the context in which it is being used. Jacob said he thinks most people automatically assume that *effective* and *efficient* have positive connotations, even before they have considered what it means for a specific process to be more efficient or more effective. Before even trying to understand the details of a process or program, Jacob has often observed colleagues immediately utilize the technically rational approach to value efficiency as the top priority. However, Jacob’s view was that educational programs and processes often must have their efficiency decreased in order to be effective. That view runs counter to the discourse of technical rationality. The importance of efficiency is not dismissed through a *phronetic* approach to decision-making. However, efficiency as a concept is only invited to the conversation by the *phronetic* leader in as far as

efficiency, as a means, can assist in achieving an ethically desirable end. When considering ethics, efficiency for efficiency's sake is not an end that should be sought.

Values conscious. Asking the 'why' when making any decision is of vital importance to Jacob's described approach to leadership. He described the 'why' as a key reminder that can keep future decisions and actions in alignment with the original goals, rather than being distracted by other non-related items. Jacob identified himself as a leader that is not satisfied with maintaining the status quo, rather he focuses on making things better for the students he serves. However, he also described his constant struggle with wondering if the stressors and frustrations he has as a Senior Student Affairs Officer would also be present in areas outside of higher education. He even questioned whether these frustrations he has are ones that are unique to the work of student affairs. He said that he thinks administrators in other areas of higher education also experience similar challenges. Sometimes, Jacob finds himself questioning what it is that he really is in his position to do. He said that he hears other administrators say things such as "I'm here for the students," and he admitted that he says the same thing at times. However, when he stops and thinks about what he really means he realizes that he is usually thinking about students from a policy and processes perspective; this is because he rarely gets to interact directly with students. Due to the nature of his responsibilities and the complexities inherent in managing facilities, budgets, people, etc., it can become a challenge to ground himself in remembering the reason for his work, which is to help students achieve their own success.

Relations of power. Job security risks are inherently related to the role of the Senior Student Affairs Officer, according to Jacob. The risks to job security are often due to unrealistic expectations regarding what can be controlled by an SSAO, specifically the expectation that human behavior (e.g. student behavior) can be controlled or predicted. Further, Jacob also

described the limitations that are placed on the leader's ability to push back against established norms and practices or expectations. An example that Jacob used to highlight this point was the guarantee of the safety of students that he perceives as having increased within the parent population and student population. He knows that it is impossible to account for all of the variables that could cause harm to a student, and often students put themselves in dangerous situations that take place outside the college or university campus. While Jacob accepts this as a reality of human behavior he also recognizes that individuals in his position can become the "fall person" when a tragic death or accident occurs with a student. In addition, Jacob discussed the difficult experiences he has had where he has personally disagreed with a decision that was made by other administrators, and he still had to implement the decision while being aware that he would be the leader held accountable for the decision if negative consequences occurred in the future.

Jacob asked questions regarding what technological advancements mean for the profession, as well as what is valued, or what values are espoused in relation to these advancements. He described how his responsibilities have shifted with technological advancements, and that this means that he spends his time differently, and he is faced with different kinds of complexities in decision-making. For example, he spends a great deal of time thinking about information systems which are seen as necessary to manage all of the data that is now collected regarding students. So, he dedicates time to thinking about software and system implementation, contracts for these systems, and how those systems must be incorporated into existing business processes that impact the student experience with course registration, bill payments, admissions applications, etc. Jacob referred to the reality of having to engage with

evolving technology in new ways as not the reason that he got into the field or what excites him when he wakes up in the morning, but that it is also “amazing, tiring, and fascinating all in one.”

Being devalued as a leader. Jacob expressed that he worries about a time when his skills and knowledge may no longer be valued in the field. He felt that he currently was in a position of strength, because he thinks that he is able to work well with the generation of staff that are younger than him as well as those that are older than him; he said he often finds himself in a position where he is negotiating a compromise between ideas and approaches that differ between younger and older administrators. He saw the value in the new ideas and approaches, but he also sees the value of the habits and the focus on principles by the older generation that may be dismissed at times by the younger generation. He wondered at what point his own views, knowledge, and skills will be viewed as obsolete. However, he thought that there are many ways in which student affairs will continue to call for similar approaches, regardless of other changes that happen in society, or advances in technology. Considering his role in student affairs, Jacob stated:

I think part of what makes me feel like I'm successful is that I believe I stay focused on the student experience. It's the idea that there are these principles that are at play, whether we realize them or not, whether we understand them or not; those principles about a young person going through a transitional time in their life will remain true. That is why we need to understand the theory, it's why we need to understand the developmental nature of working with students, and it's why we need to think about what we do as we interact with a person at that point in life.

Jacob perceived an openness to using new means of technology, or trust in new techniques, in the younger generation of staff. He thought that the practical experience of staff is dismissed by inexperienced staff as not being as valuable or being as helpful as a new theory, new form of assessment, or new technology. This observation can support the notion that technical rationality becomes normalized and is viewed as the common sense approach to

decision-making as the productive effects of such a rationality are viewed positively by a generation that has largely not experienced other techniques, and therefore may find it difficult to imagine another approach as being suitable.

Student affairs, according to Jacob, is experiencing an identity crisis, in the sense of being an academic subject that is taught through graduate programs and yet is difficult to define. He expressed a belief that part of this identity crisis is that student affairs is a fairly young professional field. He also discussed what he views as a devaluing of philosophy in education, as philosophy is not seen as having inherent use-value in the modern world; therefore, it is not prioritized within education. Jacob also expressed his disagreement with an understanding of student affairs practitioners as being either theory oriented or practice oriented. As previously stated, Jacob believes that professionals should strive for the middle ground between theory and practice. This conception, as presented by Jacob, has traces of a valuing of *phronesis* that does not understand theory and practice as being distinct, and incorporates *techne* and *episteme* while striving for the golden mean of virtuous action.

While displaying that he values *phronesis*, Jacob also discussed what I interpret as an understanding of the role that norms and regimes of rationality have on how people think, how they understand notions of truth, and how daily practices are shaped. Jacob described his own lived experience pertaining to the difficulty of being perceived as acting in a way that is different than accepted norms. This particularly related to he and his husband's choice to stop attending church and recognizing the difficulties they face in finding different kinds of communities to engage in for themselves and their child. Jacob discussed the longing to have a community to which to belong, but also recognizing that there are various communities of which he cannot be a part because he does not abide by the same norms or operate by the same rationality—including

the Catholic church. This demonstrates the struggle that one experiences when challenging an accepted rationality, practices, and social norms and how one's development of self-surveillance is developed through governmentality.

Shifting contexts. Jacob described access increasing in higher education as also changing the purpose of education and ultimately bringing about new questions and challenges. He viewed higher education as being a relatively young environment, and he described some of the challenges faced in higher education as being particularly difficult to navigate as a leader: increasing access to higher education, rising levels of student debt, and accountability measures related to learning outcomes. Jacob thought that the old ways in which higher education was organized, before increasing access to college, still causes tension as more students are now attending college. He questioned what role student affairs may actually play in either maintaining the status quo of practices and policies in higher education or leading the way to change practices and policies that are no longer compatible with the needs of college students. Jacob thought student affairs can lead the change that he believed is needed, but he did not think it is predetermined that leaders will be able to lead in the way that is needed for the new challenges that are being faced.

Culture. Culture, as defined by Jacob, constitutes the norms of a community. If a leader acts counter to these norms, then one will face challenges, including potentially be removed from the community by being fired or having their responsibilities lessened. Jacob described his understanding of what constitutes the freedom of an administrator in decision-making, and he believes that the context of the culture will always provide limits on the kind of decisions that one can make. So, an administrator's decisions are always compromised by the fact that they

hold an administrative position within an institution that has a unique culture. Jacob described the importance of considering and seeking to understand culture in the below quote:

When you think about culture as something that is the traditions, the customs, the mores of an organization then you have to understand that culture to be able to navigate it in any way, shape, or form. If you don't understand that culture you're obviously going to run into problems. If your approach is antithetical to what people in that culture have come to expect, then this can be very problematic. However, if you have an understanding of that culture and you choose to buck that norm, it may actually be what is needed even if it is not easy.

Jacob thought that a fault of many administrators is that they do not understand the culture of the institution in which they work, and this contributes to an inability to lead effectively, much less effect transformative change. He thought that as an administrator one has a responsibility to be very conscious of culture and attempt to always try to come to a greater understanding of an institution's culture.

Mentorship. Jacob described how his responsibilities have changed as he has changed positions, and moved up in the hierarchy of institutions. The role of teaching, mentoring, and coaching has lessened in regularity, as he described those responsibilities as taking up the majority of his focus when he was in his entry-level positions. He said that now he largely serves as a mentor for staff or students that seek out such a relationship with him, and he described a few staff members and students who have sought that relationship with him. Jacob thought that giving back through mentorship is important, and so he makes sure to prioritize some of his time for those organic relationships that develop. He said he also tries to find ways to have face-to-face contact with students so that he can maintain a pulse on what their experience is like; this includes trying to teach at least one class a semester as well as visiting with various student groups or meeting with student advisory boards. While he admitted the challenge is that you can never hear directly from all students or develop a relationship with each student, he recognized

the important perspectives that one can gain as an administrator if you remain open to listening to students. In addition, Jacob has had few mentors within higher education administration, so he felt called to serve as a mentor for others who may not yet have a mentor. He also specified that he has often found that he can learn a great deal from those that he supervises, particularly from individuals who have more experience than him in their specific role. So, Jacob said that the kind of relationship one has with each staff member is different and depends on the context of the situation, their experience, and the nature of the responsibilities.

Reflexive practice. Participating in the interviews helped Jacob think about things that he normally does not take the time to reflect on conceptually. This demonstrates that it is important for leaders to take the time to practice reflexivity, as well as to maintain relationships (e.g. mentor relationships, friendships, etc.) that help them maintain this practice. Late in the interview process, Jacob posited the question of whether Aristotle had many things figured out already, and that regardless of the changes in society, advances in technology, etc. perhaps the basis for Aristotle's philosophy may still be just as relevant as it was when it was first discussed and written. The portion of Jacob's interview that addressed this topic is provided below:

It's very interesting to think about the connections of church, society, education, human development, student development, contextual experiences and their impacts, and what does it all mean together in one big nutshell? We still go back to some of the ancient thinking in ways that we kind of take for granted sometimes. Which then makes you wonder, is that big 'P' philosophy or little 'p' philosophy? Because, did Aristotle have a lot of this figured out in a way that it's just capital 'T' truth along the way that it's hard to really buck?

Wisdom and virtuous character. Throughout his participation in the study Jacob was careful to consider context and share details when describing his experiences. He said that this consideration of context and ability to reflect on past experiences is what he believes has changed the most in regard to his approach to leadership. Perhaps in relation to such changes, his

focus has shifted to a desire for greater balance, as well as a developed awareness that there are practical limits to what he can accomplish in any given scenario. He said he has had to learn this over time. Therefore, he focuses on doing what he can and doing the best that he can at any point. He said he has come to the realization that his perspective and outlook is important as it relates to being satisfied with his life. In the following quote Jacob described how he takes pride in the way that he approaches his work by being of service to his staff and the students at his institution, and he said he works hard each day to make sure the division in his purview is running smoothly and is sustainable from a resource perspective:

At the end of the day I need to know that I'm going to be a good father, a good spouse, and I'm going to be somebody who's going to make an impact on what I can make an impact on that the moment that I'm doing it. So, if that's today where I am now, great. If tomorrow it's somewhere else, great. But, I can do what I do almost anywhere, and I want to leave it better than I found it. That's really all it's about, and that's all I can worry about.

However, he also said he recognizes that even though he is proud of the way he lives his life and approaches his work that he is not the “safe” administrator who will maintain the status quo. Even though he expressed that he believes more leaders should approach their work in a way that attempts to change practices and cultures within higher education institutions in a way that will remove inequitable barriers, Jacob said he is also cognizant that such an approach to leadership falls outside the norm of what is sought in a leader.

Conclusion

Overall, I think that Jacobs’s views and values align with my understanding of *phronetic* leadership. Jacob demonstrated an awareness of his own values, as well as the values of the institutions to which he is of service. He continually focused on being of service to students, and returning to the ‘why’ of as work to keep his decisions aligned with the purpose that he has as a leader. In addition, Jacob demonstrated an awareness of how dominant rationalities influence

administrative practices and what appears to be common sense. Jacob also communicated a skepticism of such common sense in practice and rationality, as he questions the true motivation behind such practices. Jacob communicated that participating in the study forced him to reflect on his own practices and to critically examine his rationality; he recognized that he often struggles to find the time to be a reflexive leader, and I believe that this study helped him re-engage in an examination of his approach to leadership that will hopefully enhance his development as a *phronetic* leader.

Part of the reasons I'm careful to not discuss what I've learned from my different experiences as universals is that I've worked at so many kinds of institutions, and as I think about all those places I realize that I could talk to you very plainly and very clearly about this experience or that experience; but, I try to think about the culmination of my experiences and how the commonalities have driven me. There are a lot of commonalities in how I approach my work. As a hall director, the director of a department, a dean of students, or as a vice president—the way I think of my purpose is fairly similar from my first professional job. What I think has changed, over the years, is my ability to reflect and think about my experiences. If you had asked me these same questions ten years ago my responses would have been different. If you asked me even three years ago some of my thoughts around some of my experiences would have been peppered by a more negative attitude because of the immediacy of a very negative work experience that I had. So, I think I'm sitting here in a place where I think I can be more reflective about the culmination of my experiences.

ANALYSIS AND SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This chapter will serve as a discussion of the research questions and a comparison of Jacob's and Joan's narratives, including how their narratives addressed the research questions. I will discuss themes I recognized across the cases. I will also provide analysis that addresses the research questions; the analysis is informed by a *phronetic* theoretical approach.

Case Comparison

Through conducting interviews with both participants I not only attempted to inform both research questions, I also attempted to provide opportunities for the participants to interrogate their own assumptions, ideologies, and ways they participate in practices that perpetuate the status quo. I did this with the intention of helping the participants recognize how their decisions are influenced by regimes of rationality, with the hope that this reflexive practice might further develop them as *phronetic* leaders. There were times during interviews with both Joan and Jacob that they expressed that they were thinking about things differently than they had previously, or they were thinking in ways that they had not thought for a long time. Jacob, who is currently working as a Senior Student Affairs Officer, also expressed that he is often so busy with his work that he does not take the time, or have the time, to stop and think about some of the questions and ideas that we discussed; however, Jacob expressed an appreciation for having the opportunity and time to think about such questions during the interviews. I count this as one indication of

success in staying in alignment with the original purpose of the study, which was for the participants to benefit by enhancing their own practice of reflexivity. While it is difficult for leaders to take regular time to reflect on their decisions, it is key for *phronetic* leadership.

Joan is approximately twenty years older than Jacob; so, she grew up in a different time period and has more years of experience in higher education administration. Joan has worked at large public universities (20,000 or more enrolled students), and she has not worked for a private higher education institution. Jacob's work experience presents greater diversity of institution type, when compared to Joan's. However, I did not identify unique themes that appeared to be associated with Jacob's diversity of experience at different institutional types. Joan's terminal degree is a doctor of philosophy of degree, and Jacob's terminal degree is a doctorate in education. It is unclear how these differences in terminal degree types may or may not have impacted Jacob and Joan. Joan did describe her practice as shifting after completing her doctor of philosophy degree, and Jacob did not mention this. Joan specifically recognized her practice as qualitatively improving after completing her Ph.D., referring to the process of completing a doctor of philosophy degree as a process that altered the way that she studied problems, made decisions, and considered information. This was a regular theme throughout the interviews with Joan, and she commented several times on how she believed my own practice would change after completing my own dissertation. Joan also referenced the philosophy classes that she took as an undergraduate student as influencing and enriching her thought processes.

Both Joan and Jacob have experience teaching at the undergraduate and graduate level, and they both expressed this as being an experience that they actively sought and valued, partly because they felt that teaching granted the opportunity to interact directly with students and learn about their experiences in higher education. The desire to 'give back' to the field, through

teaching and service within professional associations, was also a theme that both Joan and Jacob communicated. They both have experience presenting and publishing through professional associations, and they have both served in volunteer positions with professional associations. Having both taught classes regularly and served through professional associations gives Jacob and Joan an additional type of experience that many of their colleagues in the field do not possess. While I cannot say how many, or what proportion of Senior Student Affairs Officers have gained similar experiences, with a stated commitment of giving back to the field, I think it is safe to say that these experiences are not ones that are sought nor gained by the majority of Senior Student Affairs Officers. I think that these experiences have helped Joan and Jacob gain a broader understanding and awareness of higher education administration, and have provided them with opportunities to view the impact of their decisions in various settings.

Joan's professional experience began in the enrollment management area of higher education administration, and she later gained experience in supervising other areas within student affairs. Enrollment management offices may fall within academic affairs, and ultimately report through a provost, rather than a Senior Student Affairs Officer. Joan's experiences included working at universities where enrollment management was separate from student affairs, as well as where it reported through the division of student affairs. Jacob's professional experience began as a high school English teacher, and he later transitioned to working as a higher education administrator. Jacob's higher education administration experience was grounded in residential life roles, which I believe influenced his awareness of the personal difficulties that many students face while attending college. The differences in type of experience have undoubtedly informed the ways that Jacob and Joan think through decisions as higher education administrators. Neither of their experiences are qualitatively better or more valuable

than the other's experiences; I wish only to point out that the differences in their practical experiences have undoubtedly contributed to informing their leadership approaches in nuanced ways that are impossible to discern.

It is apparent that Jacob's ability to articulate his practical wisdom, values, and leadership approach is different than Joan's ability. The qualitative difference lies in what I perceive as Joan's ability to communicate a more distilled awareness of her values and how her approach to leadership consciously incorporates an awareness of her values. This does not surprise me, due to the differential in practical experience for Jacob (e.g. less practical experience due to his younger age). This analysis supports my theoretical understanding of *phronetic* leadership, as well as the selection of both Jacob and Joan as exemplars of *phronetic* leadership. Jacob's process of becoming a *phronetic* leader is a younger one than Joan's; therefore, he has had fewer opportunities to engage with complex decisions. This does not mean that Joan should be evaluated as being a better leader or more *phronetic* leader than Jacob; however, the truth is that Joan has been able to hone her practical wisdom, skill, and knowledge by engaging with a greater number of cases that have required her to make decisions. So, the differential in experience of Joan and Jacob, as well as the assessed qualitative difference in their practical wisdom serve as cases that support the theoretical description of *phronetic* leadership as being informed by the character dispositions and practical experiences of the leader. The process of engaging with complex decisions gives a leader the opportunity to continually hone their character dispositions, knowledge, and skills—and thereby accumulate practical wisdom that is able to recognize and interpret greater nuance in situations.

Themes

The following themes were identified across both participants' narratives:

- 1) Motivation to serve students associated with values and lived experience
- 2) Being accountable to the public impacts leadership approaches
- 3) Technical rationality influences common sense leadership approaches
- 4) One's approach to leadership is devalued over time
- 5) A leader should understand the values and culture of a community

These themes are reflective of the wisdom that Joan and Jacob have developed through their lived experiences.

Motivation to serve students associated with values and lived experience. Both Joan and Jacob identified themselves as being leaders who are values conscious, who consider the mission of the institutions for which they have been of service, and they consider how their values align with the mission of the institutions for which they have served. Perhaps in relation to their difference in age, gender identification, and sexual orientation, there were differences in the discussion of awareness of norms, relations of power, and expectations regarding their behavior. Both Joan and Jacob discussed recognizing from an early age that there were social norms of which they were aware they did not adhere. For example, Joan discussed her awareness that the way that she preferred to act, and the values she held, often were not in alignment with the social norms regarding how a young woman 'should' act, particularly in a Southern context. Joan identified herself as a feminist, which is something she recognized about herself from a young age, and she realized that this meant that her values often were in conflict with the status quo. Joan expressed that this awareness of the struggles she faced as a woman who attempted to disrupt the status quo, particularly as it related to professional hierarchies that favored men,

served as a motivator to help young women in college realize their own success. The following quote, by Joan, describes how she became aware of the way that her own lived experience influenced her values:

The women always affected me more than the men, and probably because I was female, and I knew what a tough time it was for me. I entered the workforce where I had slightly older female compatriots and colleagues who were fighting hard against the system because they couldn't get promoted for this or they couldn't get promoted for that, and where I worked, at that university, there was clearly a certain type of female that would get promoted, and I didn't fall into those lines.

In addition, Joan discussed that she developed a framework for approaching decisions that included always thinking about how to make decisions that were equitable and consistent. She also determined over time that the institutions that she believed most aligned with her own values were land-grant institutions that were in states where the public generally supported greater access to a higher education. Joan was drawn to higher education institutions that had values-informed missions and institutional practices that most closely aligned with her own values. This included serving at institutions whose missions were focused on providing access to a higher education for students within the state, which she related to her focus on striving for improving equity. Joan found that she felt fulfilled and successful as a leader when she was able to lead within land-grant institutions.

Jacob expressed an awareness from a young age that he was different from many of his peers, largely in relation to his sexual orientation. He described that the experience of finding support for the first time, when in college, as what attracted him to working in student affairs. His desire to work in student affairs granted him the opportunity to help provide various forms of support for students who would also be identified as breaking some kind of social norm, due to their social identities. The following quote provides insight regarding how Jacob's lived experience influenced his values as a leader:

When I was growing up I realized that I had to keep things to myself and not share openly or probably I'd get physically hurt, or at least verbally so. As I became aware of my own identity and became aware of all of the stigmas that come along with my coming out process I became an ally to others who were facing other, similar, identity struggles. I think that that has stayed with me throughout my entire life and it has become my kind of personal rallying cry to help others when they are silenced.

Jacob's practice continues to be informed from his own lived experience as a college student.

Additionally, he aims to be a leader who makes decisions in a courageous manner that can challenge the status quo that he often sees as maintaining inequitable barriers for students.

Being accountable to the public impacts leadership approaches. Serving in a position in which one is accountable to the public, as a governor of others behavior to align with certain norms and values, is a reality of serving as an SSAO at a public higher education institution. Joan and Jacob both discuss the concept of being accountable to the public. Jacob's discussion of accountability to the public appears as a discussion of how he perceives the public as viewing the pursuit of a higher education through the lens of a value proposition. In this sense, higher education is viewed as a product that is supposed to help an individual student obtain the skills and knowledge necessary to obtain a higher paying job, or gain access to a career field that would not otherwise be obtainable for said student. Jacob discussed the skepticism he believes many individuals have regarding whether higher education is worth the financial investment or accumulation of debt that is required of many students, particularly as attendance costs continue to rise. Jacob provides a description of this understanding through the following quote:

It's an arms race in higher education to get more students in your door and to find more ways to provide affordability. Often times that equates to more loan borrowing, which eventually leads to more students leaving with high levels of debt. So, how are we allowing students to leave more successful when we've already put them in such heavy debt that some of them will never climb out of it? To me it's a vicious cycle that we've produced here and nothing is changing. Now I think the American public is starting to change here a little bit. I think people are starting to question the value proposition of higher education.

While Jacob did not express an agreement with this view of education as only serving as a commodity that is to be obtained by students in order to achieve a higher financial standing in life, he did express that this perception has tangible impacts on practices and decisions in higher education. Jacob is highly aware of the ways that the legislature in his state are continually involved on what he called a micro level, to include legislating the official curriculum and how financial aid is awarded. So, Jacob's practices and decisions are impacted by elected public officials as well as by an awareness of the dominant discourse that he perceives as being common sense for most current and future students in higher education. This awareness serves as a form of self-surveillance (compatible with a Foucauldian understanding of governmentality) as Jacob makes decisions and considers what is likely to be accepted by the public.

Joan also discussed the rising cost of attendance, and she linked that to the public. Joan labels a commitment to the public as being aware of the "public trust"; however, she appears to describe her understanding of an accountability to the public more as an accountability to the collective. Conversely, Jacob's focus appears more as a focus on an accountability to individual students. This demonstrates a slight, albeit important, conceptual distinction that may impact how either of them approaches decisions. Joan described the impact of the rising costs of attendance as:

Going to college, as much as it costs, is a public trust. One of the reasons that higher education is in trouble is that we've broken trust because we've raised prices, and we're not showing enough of the value of what that stands for.

While both Jacob and Joan repeatedly discussed their primary mission as being of service to students, Joan more clearly articulated her understanding as including having to be of service to students in ways that are often unpopular with the students, with other administrators, or with faculty. This could include expelling a student from school for a student conduct violation,

managing the ways in which students can protest, and making difficult decisions that there are not enough resources in the division to develop an identity-based student service. Joan more clearly explained this as a difficult reality of the role that one has as a Senior Student Affairs Officer when she described the responsibilities of the position as inevitably meaning that you will be fighting with someone or disappointing someone at any given moment. Joan articulated that those individuals or groups with whom you may be fighting could possibly be the university president, the board of regents/trustees for the university, student groups, or individual students.

With a diversity of expectations regarding how a leader should make decisions, it is clear that it is a difficult task to attempt to define how various decisions may influence the public's trust. Joan communicated an awareness of this difficulty, and she said that is why she learned to take great care when considering the intentions behind her decisions as well as how to communicate her intentions in a manner that was likely to reduce potential mistrust of her decisions. Joan expressed understanding of the public trust and how she believes that the expectations that students have when attending college often disproportionality fall in the student services areas, and that these services often fall under the purview of a Senior Student Affairs Officer. She said,

College is an intangible product. That's the great thing and the hard thing about university education. Students can't say well I just want to take these classes, because if they want to get a degree they have to follow the course catalog, whether they like it or not. That ends up being okay though, because they've been educated in a system pretty much like that. As long as their other expectations match they are usually okay. Those other expectations usually fall in the student life areas, and that is where it can be difficult as a Senior Student Affairs Officer to meet those expectations.

In addition, Joan described the challenges that one faces as an SSAO when the “before-market promise” is communicated by staff or departments that do not report directly to the SSAO; this, according Joan, creates a challenge because the responsibility of matching the

“after-market delivery” to the “before-market promise” falls on staff that were not able to develop and deliver a message that was more truthful and accurate. She expressed this when she said,

You have to understand your role, you have to understand liability, you have to understand if you speak for the university that you are indebted in some way. You have to consider what you are promising, what's the public trust, what's the true liability, what can you do, and what do you feel comfortable doing that you know is your moral standard? If you are not truthful and consistent with that communication and delivery then you lose the public trust.

Joan's focus on grounding her leadership in an awareness of being of service to the public clearly influences the way that she has approached her roles as a student affairs administrator.

Jacob discussed his understanding of the public trust. Jacob describes losing the trust of the public as being related to the increasing monetary input and accumulation of debt that is now required for many individuals to seek a higher education. Jacob goes on to question whether there is an honest recognition by higher education administrators of the challenges that are faced by this trend that he views as resulting in tangible changes in higher education practices and how decisions are made by leaders. Jacob's awareness is indicative of an awareness of the ways in which dominant rationalities manifest in concrete practices, policies, and in the common sense that informs decisions; his awareness is described through the following quote:

A lot of our challenges I think stem from that arms race I mentioned that has kind of become the defining way that we identify, as well as what we do as administrators anymore. So, we all tout out mission statements that talk about access, affordability, equity, and all these key critical words that resonate with people and you say, "well that makes sense". But, the reality is what does it ultimately mean? And, how are we measuring true success out there?

An additional leadership challenge that Joan identified as relating to being accountable to the public is the challenge of maintaining an awareness of evolving social expectations regarding the need to offer specialized services for students, based on various social identities. While Joan

largely agrees with the desire to provide such services for students, she said that the reality is that the financial and personnel resources are not provided for divisions of student affairs in a manner that allows for an SSAO to provide student services that will meet such expectations. Joan links this evolution in the expectations placed on universities as relating to ever increasing access to higher education, which has led to a more diverse and socially-conscious student body at most higher education institutions. The challenge of addressing such expectations was a growing stressor that Joan described as being a concern that she could never fully address as a leader; there were always new expectations, and the resources that were at her disposal continued to shrink as budgets were reduced and resources were allocated to other areas of the university; the following quote describes Joan's understanding of the difficulties faced by Senior Student Affairs Officers:

Part of what's difficult right now in student affairs is focusing on very small populations which absolutely deserve respect and attention. Whether it's victims of sexual assault, transgender populations, veterans, students who need comfort animals in the residence halls, etc. None of those populations is wrong in what they need. They all need very specialized services. Can we really deliver all of the special services to students that they expect to get? Because, that's what they expect, and that's what their parents expect, if they're traditional-aged students. They expect it because they pay so much to go to college. I absolutely support it in spirit, absolutely support it in ideology, but practically there's not enough money, and nobody tries to make that a priority.

While Jacob does not describe this challenge in quite the same depth as Joan, he does present a question of how services provided can continue to get more and more specialized, which in turn requires more resources in order to have the impact that is espoused through mission statements by institutions and values statements that are made publicly by professional associations. He specifically questions how this increasing specialization in student services is and will be perceived by the public, as he views the majority of citizens as likely not agreeing with the decisions made to provide such specialized identity-based services. Jacob is highlighting

the difficulty one faces as a student affairs leader to determine what is not only practical, but also what is the right thing to do, within context, that may achieve more equitable outcomes for the community. The below quote summarizes Jacob's understanding:

I think we've got a lot of accountability coming our way in higher education, in general, but I think especially people are going to start being overly critical, and maybe rightfully so in some cases, of some of the programs, resources, and services that are meant to serve specific populations.

Technical rationality influences common sense leadership approaches. This theme relates to a Foucauldian understanding of regimes of rationality, as well as how certain administrative practices can appear as if they are common sense. A distinction between efficiency and effectiveness was shared by both Joan and Jacob, which included a recognition that these terms are often conflated by others as meaning the same thing. They both observe a predominance of the conflation of these two terms within the dominant discourse in higher education. Specifically, efficiency is prioritized over effectiveness, and if a decision or approach is viewed as being efficient then it is assumed that it must also be effective. So, the understanding of these terms has shifted as what is prioritized is altered by regimes of rationality; I believe that Foucault would agree with their recognition of the tangible effects of a regime of rationality. According to both Joan and Jacob's descriptions, efficiency is increasingly viewed as the primary priority when making decisions in higher education. While they both see the need to focus on efficiency, so as to be able to apply limited resources in meaningful ways, they also express disagreement with technical rationality's prioritization of efficiency above all other considerations or values. So, through the extension of this technocratic discourse the truthful understanding of the concepts of efficiency and effectiveness is lost, and practices are impacted in concrete ways. By critiquing the effects of technical rationality, and by providing an alternate understanding of an ideal approach for making decisions, Joan and Jacob present an

understanding of decision making that appears similar to *phronetic* leadership. Joan relates efficiency to technical rationality in the below portion of her response, and she also specifies that her ethic of operation is not efficiency, even though she does always look for how efficiency can be improved:

I'm all about efficiency. And, I'm all about effectiveness. I hate red tape. A lot of things I worked with over the years had processes attached to them and I was all about making those as streamlined as possible every time I could. However, even in the enrollment areas, which are the ones I know best, when you dive into processes and appeals there's usually more than one side of a story, and you're lucky if there's just two. If you don't look at it with something other than efficiency or a technical expertise (e.g. having the necessary tools to do that job, which could include expertise in residency laws or financial aid regulations), then you will not be making decisions that are the best decisions.

While Joan critiqued technical rationality as not being the most appropriate approach to making decisions as an SSAO, she took care to communicate that she does not think technical expertise is unimportant. She recognized the distinction between technical rationality as having a similar influence on decisions as an ideology would. While she thought that technical rationality could not always lead to the best decisions as an SSAO, she did specify that there are times where it is necessary to take a more technical approach when making a decision. Joan said that the situation may dictate this, as certain standards have deemed this as being necessary in such situations; the following quote addresses this topic:

This is experience talking, but very honestly if you're in a legal situation and you are looking at student code of conduct matters, sexual assault matters, Cleary Act matters, or a process that has an order to it that has been spelled out previously, such as public speech, then you have to understand your role; your role is to understand liability, what it means to speak on behalf of the university—how that indebts you, what you are promising—what's the public trust, what you can do, and what you feel comfortable doing according to your moral standards. Quite frankly, your moral standards don't stack up first in those examples, and you have to understand that's the way it is. You can't decide when your opinion is more important than the good of the institution.

What Joan has communicated is that there are certain problems and situations that one will face as a leader that will require that decisions are made in a structured manner, and that in many

ways the way the decisions are made will almost be pre-scripted. This is due to lessons being learned from past situations that resemble the problem that one is facing as a leader. A leader must recognize that there are standards and principles already agreed upon through the development of laws and the past interpretation of said laws; those principles must serve as a guide in such situations so as to not act arrogantly and put the institution at risk by making an uninformed decision.

Jacob makes a direct point regarding the rationality that equates efficiency and effectiveness as being interchangeable. His challenge of the predominate discourse that enables such an understanding of efficiency and effectiveness demonstrates traces of *phronetic* leadership. Jacob expressed the importance of considering context when attempting to evaluate the effectiveness of any decision, because he believes that sometimes a process or program actually must be made less efficient in order to be more effective; the following quote describes Jacob's view that efficiency and effectiveness need to be carefully defined and understood:

You've got to have an agreement on what does efficient and what does effective mean. Some people use these things sometimes interchangeably, or as a combined thing, to suggest something. And, I think both have positive connotations when most people try to use them. I argue that the only thing that makes anything positive in any value, label, or assessment is in the context in which you're using it. You have to take time to have that ethic of care to actually consider how students will be impacted by the decision, and what is in their best interest.

Jacob provided examples of considering the goal of making any decision, and to make sure that those goals are prioritized when making the decision. Two examples that Jacob used were that when processing transcripts there is likely a high degree of automation and increased efficiency that can be realized, and that greater efficiency will likely positively impact the student experience. Jacob identified efficiency in that example as being necessary to improve the student experience because it is likely that increased efficiency will help remove barriers for students who are transferring to a different institution or applying for graduate school and therefore need

their transcript processed quickly. However, another example Jacob provided served to highlight how greater efficiency could lead to a less effective educational process. This example was the process of reviewing student conduct cases and meeting with students regarding individual cases. As he specified, if the goal is to provide the opportunity for meaningful and personalized learning opportunities, regarding conduct as a member of the university community, as well as to try to understand personal challenges of the student, then it is more important to work with each student in face-to-face meetings. Jacob defines this process as being much less efficient than assigning sanctions through a letter to each student, but ultimately the face-to-face meetings should be a more effective approach when prioritizing the goals of meaningful learning and practicing an ethic of care for each student; the following quote summarizes Jacobs view:

I think people use these words a lot of time in ways where they combine them. You'll hear people say, "we're going to be efficient and effective." I'm always really skeptical of that. I'm really going to challenge that on some level.

One's approach to leadership is devalued over time. At different points in the interview process both Joan and Jacob asked questions regarding what it means to be relevant as a leader, as well as if there is a point at which one's skills, experience, and wisdom are no longer relevant or valued. I evaluate this as being a symptom of the dominant discourse of technical rationality that values improving technology/techniques above practical wisdom of a leader. So, an experienced *phronetic* leader's ability to make contextual decisions for a community is considered less valid than a leader who possesses knowledge of the newest universalized best practices (regardless of context). Joan's perspective is that of a recently retired Senior Student Affairs Officer who was dealing with a transition from full-time work to part-time contractual work; she was also weighing the possibility of future interim work as a Senior Student Affairs Officer. The ability to reflect on questions from a viewpoint that had greater distance from the

lived experience of serving as a Senior Student Affairs Officer was a perspective that could not be shared in the same way by Jacob, as he is likely in the middle of his career and actively serving as a Senior Student Affairs Officer; therefore, Jacob does not have the same time for reflection on past experiences, and he also has not had the depth of experience that Joan has as a Senior Student Affairs Officer. While both of them brought up the same question of how to recognize when one becomes devalued or irrelevant as a leader, the active transition out of the role seemed to bring up more salient points for Joan. Part of Joan's reflection is shared below:

Glory is very temporary, I've had glory many times, but it's fleeting, and it never was the purpose. I never worked for glory. I tried to work for good, or for my morals, or my belief system, to help others, and to improve the human condition. That's why I went to work: to try to get young people into college, because I knew that their lives would improve if they went to college. Yet, the further I get from the work the more I realize that as good as it all is, and as important as the work is, the experience of leadership is fleeting. What does that then mean? What do you do with your gifts? Maybe that's just on my mind right now because I've got more time on my hands and I don't feel as productive, and I don't feel as if I'm achieving as much, and I still feel like I have things to impart. Knowledge to impart and people to help. Maybe you never quit leading, teaching, mentoring, whatever the words are, because if somebody talks to me on a bus or on an airplane or whatever and somebody starts talking about college and asks me a question I always talk to them, I always tell them stuff, I always try to help. I mean that will always be true.

In addition to her reflection of what it means to redefine her purpose or how she can spend her time in a way that can still fulfill her desire to be of service to others and to give back in some form, Joan also shared how she slowly began to realize that she no longer felt that her approach to leadership was valued in the way that it had been previously. This included a perception that her focus on fundamentals was not valued as much as being able to deliver flashy programs for students; she viewed those flashy programs as not actually meeting the goals that were espoused by the institutional mission, yet they were still prioritized by her superiors above what she viewed as fundamentals that would better serve students and meet the institutional mission. Joan also described her experience as not being unique, because she shared that she had

communicated with various SSAO colleagues over the last several years, and she observed their employing higher education institutions change in similar ways as the institutions for which she worked. She said that the challenges of having institutions reorganize divisions of student affairs is happening more often than not, often due to budgetary concerns and in order to address public concerns of unnecessary spending on administrative positions. She has observed a trend in reorganizing divisions of student affairs so that the SSAO is ultimately demoted by reporting through a provost or an executive vice president, and therefore no longer reports directly to the university president. In addition to this hierarchical reorganization, Joan has also seen the impact of this being that older SSAOs are either forced to retire early or decide to retire early, and much younger and less experienced leaders are then hired for the vacated SSAO position; the following quote serves to describe Joan's observation:

Whatever sadness you hear in my voice...some of that sadness is because I just came to the realization that I didn't think I could do it any longer. I didn't think I could deliver what was needed or expected. Some of it was that I didn't want to try anymore, because I beat my head on the wall too much. And, some of it was I'm not really sure I'm going to have the answers that are needed, because I may have outlived my usefulness in this field, and some of it was burnout.

While discussing how approaches to problems may vary according to one's age and experience, Jacob questioned at what point he will be viewed as no longer having a relevant perspective by his colleagues, peers, or superiors. This question was posed by Jacob as he was discussing how he currently views his ability to connect the younger and older generation of administrators by being able to see the value of different perspectives and approaches that he sees as being typical of individuals from older and younger generations. He described a typical focus by the younger generation of prioritizing approaches to decisions that incorporate new forms of technology while not having the ability to apply the perspective of the older generation that is informed by wisdom gained through lived experience. However, Jacob also seemed to

critique administrators in the older generation as often not being as open to the value that new techniques or approaches could bring when needing to address challenges that have not previously been encountered. Jacob sees himself as currently being in a position of strength, because he believes he is often able to remain open to combining the ideas and approaches of others in a way that determines the best possible decision. He describes himself as a “middle person” in the following quote:

I think I'm kind of this middle person and it's an interesting position to be in. It makes me wonder when do I become not irrelevant, but this kind of archaic person within the organization that can no longer do that. When I worry about that I always bring my thinking back to one thing—the student experience. I think part of what makes me feel like I'm successful, even if I'm not, is that I believe I stay focused on the student experience.

A leader should understand the values and culture of a community. Jacob and Joan both discuss the idea of bringing about change in the practices of an organization. They discussed the difficulty that one faces when trying to become aware of the culture, norms, and practices of an organization, while also to incorporating that awareness into one's approach to enact change. Jacob described the number one downfall of administrators as being that they are not aware of the culture of the community in which they serve. He further described the freedom of a leader's decisions as being inevitably limited by choosing to serve in a leadership position within said community. Jacob's following quote describes his awareness of the culture as being vital to lead successfully:

In general, I would say that I believe that freedom is compromised by culture. You have to understand a culture to be able to navigate it in any way, shape, or form. I want to preface my comments by saying I don't think culture always compromises freedom. I think the comprehension or understanding that one has within a culture can compromise one's freedom in decision making. You become a person in that culture that can contribute and that can perpetuate the status quo, or you can become that kind of transition person that says I'm going to buck this. However that outcome plays out, you can either redefine it or you can shape it in some way that allows for change to occur. I think as an administrator you have a responsibility to actually be very conscious of culture when enacting change. By the same token, I think it's what makes or defines the all-stars in the administrative world. I don't think anybody becomes a rock star transformative figure by just maintaining the status quo within a safe culture.

Joan discussed this theme of being aware of an institution's culture and values when she talked about recognizing that various higher education institutions have a unique culture and values-informed missions. Even if those cultures shift over time, Joan believed it was vital for an administrator to be able to take an, "environmental scan," to assess the culture and be able to more accurately perceive how various decisions may go over politically within the campus; the following quote addresses Joan's understanding of an institution's culture:

There is a campus collective, there is a campus memory, there is a conscience, there are values espoused and truly believed and maintained, there is behavior that is more acceptable than others, all those things that form a culture that really does exist.

Joan also reflected on how her experiences differed depending upon the culture and values of the institutions for which she worked. She also discussed how awareness developed that she should take care when deciding if she should take a different job at a different institution, due to perceived insurmountable differences in the values that were inherent to a institution's culture and her own values. She believes that her own values have been influenced by her experiences working at various institutions, and as she began to more clearly define her values she began to seek employment opportunities with institutions that she perceived as having cultures and missions that closely aligned with her values; the below block quote includes a

reflection by Joan regarding how a leader should attempt to evaluate an institution's culture and consider how it will impact the leader's ability to lead:

I realized that I had to start thinking of culture and people's values, not just my values and how I work with an institution. You should think about that before you go someplace. Get a lay of the land. What are the values of the institution? What are the values of the people of the state? Do your values match that? How do you fit into that, or don't you? Where I didn't fit the culture, as I had hoped, there was a bigger disconnect in what the institution's values were and what it appeared they were initially on the surface. Even though you try to find that out on the front end it's not always easy to evaluate. Institutions have their own personalities and cultures. I tried to evaluate what was the leadership ideology, and does that fit the institution? Does the president fit it? Does that go all the way back to the board, does that go back to the president if there's a level of technical rationality, or if that's one of the prevailing ideologies? You have to try to determine those things to know how you will be accepted as a leader.

Revisiting the Purpose of the Study

It is important to reflect on the originally stated purpose of this study, as this purpose served as a guide and continual reminder on which I reflected during times of planning, as well as during quick moments of thought regarding how to respond or follow-up during an interview (Cheek, 2008, p. 206). The first part of the purpose of this study was to explore if Senior Student Affairs Officers value practical wisdom in decision making, even if they do not have the language to describe *phronesis*. Based on the responses shared and themes of the narratives, for both Joan and Jacob, it is clear that they value practical wisdom when making decisions. While Joan was more familiar with virtue ethics, and some other Aristotelian concepts, I also evaluate Jacob as describing a belief in the importance of a *phronetic* approach to leadership. Both Joan and Jacob communicated a prioritization of contextual considerations when making decisions, placed importance on the values and character dispositions of the leader, and considered the nuances of norms and culture of a higher education community.

An additional part of the purpose of the study was to explore how the participants' *phronetic* leadership abilities are limited through the relations of power that constitute productive

effects of technical rationality. Again, while Jacob and Joan were exposed to the description of technical rationality for the first time, and therefore were unfamiliar with the vocabulary and conceptual details, they still both described experiences in which mechanisms of power (e.g. surveillance, accountability measures, and official knowledge) had productive effects on their practices as leaders. They both provided critiques of the conflation of efficiency with effectiveness, which served as an indicator that they both recognized the productive effects of technical rationality and expressed concern with the consequences of such a rationality (Kavanagh, 2013). Both Joan and Jacob were also careful to describe their critique of technical rationality as not being a critique of technical expertise, or a dismissal of the need for technical expertise; instead, they highlighted a need for technical competence (skill and knowledge) that should be informed by and paired with a leader's ability to consistently strive for the most effective and ethical action that can be realized in practice. Here, too they also both demonstrated an acceptance of the practical limits of any leader's ability to achieve ideal outcomes universally and through all decisions. Through their descriptions, both Joan and Jacob described their approach to leadership and decision-making as reflecting a moral philosophy that was values-conscious, informed by context, and not predetermined; therefore, their descriptions were more reflective of the moral philosophy of *phronesis* (virtue ethics) than that of technical rationality (utilitarian ethics) (Dunne, 1993; Rosenberg, 2012).

In addition, participating in this study was meant to contribute to helping the participants develop their *phronetic* approach to leadership so that they could engage in wise actions that seek to connect means and ends and thereby realize a more contextually-situated ethical decision-making approach (Frank, 2012). This is a more difficult part of the purpose to evaluate, as this is a discussion of the process of *phronetic* leadership which cannot be measured as a static

outcome (Flyvbjerg, 1998). Yet, what can be evaluated is that the opportunities were successfully provided through this study for the participants to reflect on their values, past experiences, and the effects of technical rationality on their own practice. The value of participating in this study was communicated at different times by both participants, specifically as it helped them consider their practice in a new way. I argue that participating in the study helped the participants gain confidence in defining their own approach to leadership and how it differs from a technical approach to leadership. Therefore, participating in this study provided the opportunity to further develop a critique of the problematic effects of a larger discourse that presents technical rationality as the ideal from which approaches to leadership and decisions should flow. Both Joan and Jacob also communicated that to practice as a *phronetic* leader can be lonely when one encounters technical rationality's mechanisms of power that serve to dismiss a *phronetic* approach to leadership as being invalid or an unintelligent approach to leadership. Joan reflected on a life of flourishing as a leader, which included the transitional perspective of redefining her purpose and searching for new ways to be of service after retiring from full-time work. Demonstrating that he is at a different point in his life, Jacob shared a moment of clarity that communicated a realized confidence in the value of his approach to leadership and communicated a desire to strive to continually improve upon his approach to leadership.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study served to guide the questions I asked during the interviews, and they framed my analysis of the transcribed data. The research questions were:

- 1) What decision making and leadership approaches do SSAOs say they use when leading as an SSAO, and how do these approaches appear similar or different than *phronetic* leadership?

- 2) How are their leadership and decision-making approaches guided by technical rationality in higher education, by power relations, as well as by their own lived experiences?

Conclusion

In reference to the first research question, the participants discussed their approaches to leadership and decision making. Both participants shared that they valued and preferred to consider context when making decisions as a leader. They both critiqued decision-making approaches that would be so formulaic or prescriptive that they would fail to consider context. Consideration of context appears similar to an understanding of a *phronetic* approach to leadership (Flyvbjerg, 1998). Jacob and Joan also both discussed their approach to decision making as involving a continual consideration of the ‘why’ behind the decision, as well as the purpose or goal as informing how they consider choices and consequences. Remembering the original goal, the purpose, and the ‘why’ are similar descriptors of keeping the ends and means in conversation, rather than separating them and therefore risking an unethical decision. This approach to decision making appears similar to *phronetic* leadership. Jacob and Joan both discussed the difficulty associated with knowing when to push for change or to challenge norms through a decision, as they both shared that one must constantly consider the possibility that a decision could lead to one being fired or transitioned out of the position of Senior Student Affairs Officer (Smith & Hughey, 2006 as cited in Kuk, King, & Forrest, 2012). As Joan and Jacob both shared, the decisions that could lead to such an occurrence are vast and often unforeseeable until they occur.

Perhaps more clearly than Jacob, Joan communicated an approach that took care in considering what she referred to as the “political winds.” Jacob communicated the reality of

having to weigh a decision that does not align with one's values and deciding if he would be willing to lose his ability to lead in the community in the future, because, if he fought too hard against making such a decision, he could be fired or viewed as resistant to the common sense or normalized values of a community. Both of their perspectives show an awareness of the mechanisms of power, as well as the discourse that supports measures of accountability for divisions of student affairs to 'prove' their worth through quantitative measures—including using predetermined learning outcomes for assessments (Tierney, 2012). The awareness and description of the realities that must be considered by SSAOs is also reflective of my understanding of *phronetic* leadership as an approach to leadership that accepts that it is not possible for the individual leader to make every desired decision; sometimes the leader must realize that decisions will be made for them and that their decisions will fall under various forms of surveillance; or, if a leader feels that they cannot continue to lead in an ethical manner, then the leader should consider seeking out a different opportunity in another community. This reality highlights the constant tension that is present when making decisions as a *phronetic* leader, as well as that stability is fleeting and one's standing in a community is ever in flux. Striving for the virtuous decision, with a consideration of context, is never an easy task (Flyvbjerg, 1998). However, a leader can improve their ability to make decisions through the habitual application and refinement of their character and wisdom by engaging in the struggle of continually making such decisions.

In reference to the second research question, Jacob and Joan were aware of their own values and how their values guided their decisions. Joan discussed the awareness she gained—through experience—regarding the importance of trying to work for higher education institutions that aligned with her personal values. Jacob did not discuss as similar a view as Joan regarding

identifying an institutional type and mission that best aligns with his values; in fact, Jacob has worked at many different kinds of higher education institutions that therefore represent a great amount of diversity in missions. However, Jacob did reflect on the alignment he perceives between his values and that of a community college, specifically as it relates to being able to provide equitable educational opportunities for students, due to a mission of open access that he believes is best achieved by community colleges. Jacob attended a community college as a student, but his current role with a community college is the first administrative position he's held within a community college. Jacob finds great meaning in serving at a community college, because he thinks that transformational opportunities can be provided for students who come from a background of poverty or who have other challenges in their life that contribute to scarce opportunities to pursue an education. Jacob's and Joan's awareness of their own values, as well as those of the higher education institutions for which they serve(d), are reflective of a *phronetic* leadership approach that is aware of values (Griggs & Howarth, 2012).

The responses provided by Jacob and Joan indicated that technical rationality and relations of power effect their approaches to leadership and decision-making. The impact of measures of accountability within higher education, as well as the expectation that educational outcomes can and should be measured quantitatively, are reflective of the impact that technical rationality has on their practice as administrators. While neither Jacob or Joan display an overall agreement with technical rationality, they both recognized that technical rationality is reflected in many practices, as well as the default approach to decision-making for many administrators. Joan pointed out that she believes there are times where a more prescriptive approach to decision-making is necessary, particularly when the decision carries legal or safety risks. It is when making those decisions that Joan seeks advisement from technical experts in those areas, such as

legal counsel. I argue that this view by Joan is reflective of her experiences in enrollment management. Enrollment management includes areas that are closely surveilled by entities outside the institutional community (i.e., the federal government or accrediting bodies), so as to ensure that standards and laws are adhered to in practice in the areas of student financial aid, degree-certification, etc. However, even with the need to take a more prescriptive approach to certain decisions, Joan and Jacob both dismiss technical rationality as an ideal. Instead, they discuss the importance of considering context and utilizing professional judgement.

Relations of power and technical rationality do appear to influence the decision-making approaches of Jacob and Joan. There was a thorough discussion of accountability to the public, specifically as it related to the cost of higher education and needing to prove the worth of student affairs programs and practices. Joan described becoming tired of having to argue for certain resources and practices that were obvious to her as being necessary to operate in an excellent manner, while also being of service to students. Jacob also regularly questioned what is communicated as common sense, such as conflating efficiency with effectiveness, which demonstrated an awareness of a larger discourse shaping practices through a dominant rationality (technical rationality). Jacob also expressed disagreement with the discourse that describes competition as being necessary between various schools that in fact serve different missions. In various ways Joan's and Jacob's experiences reflect the effects of regimes of rationality and relations of power on administrative practice.

DISCUSSION

Limitations of the Study

The study had several limitations, many of which were due to practical considerations regarding time and scope. I discuss these limitations in this section. I do not claim that the narratives presented of the Senior Student Affairs Officers who participated in the study are representative of all Senior Student Affairs Officers. In fact, since the participants were selected partially due to meeting the criteria that they demonstrate leadership approaches and character dispositions that were indicative of *phronetic* leadership it is likely that other Senior Student Affairs Officers who lead in different ways would provide narratives that indicate different themes. Other potential participants, who also show the dispositions of a *phronetic* leader, would bring different experience, different backgrounds, and different interpretations of what it means to be a virtuous leader. However, this is not to say that the narratives of the individuals who participated are any less valuable than the narratives of other potential participants. In fact, to evaluate the study in this way would be to apply a logic that is incompatible with the communicated purpose of the study (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Another limitation of the study is that the study is limited by my analysis as a researcher. This is not to suggest that my analysis should be vetted with the goal of an unachievable objective analysis, rather, this is to recognize that a different researcher would inevitably have not only produced different data through the conduction of interviews, a different researcher would also analyze the data through their own lens of experience, values, and epistemology. If a different researcher were to interview the same

participants it is likely that different themes would be suggested, although it is also likely that many of the same themes would also be present in the analysis. An important limitation to recognize is that participants were selected in large part due to a pre-existing relationship between the researcher and the participants, which was due to a need to align with the purpose of the study and to have existing rapport aid with the ability to discuss complex and sensitive topics. In addition, having previous experience with and knowledge of the leadership dispositions of the participants was a central component of the participant selection, as this aligned with a theoretical understanding of Aristotelian virtue ethics.

Possibilities for Future Research

Further research should be conducted that will involve more participants, so as to bring in a richer description of different experiences of other Senior Student Affairs Officers. If I were to conduct research in the future, the skills and knowledge I have gained through this experience should improve my ability to press for richer and more nuanced responses, as well as improve my ability to analyze the data. Future research that included a co-researcher collaboration, with a more experienced professional in the field, could also improve the depth of questions that are asked; with the help of a co-researcher, the questions could be informed by experience that has contributed to a greater awareness of the complexities faced by Senior Student Affairs Officers. While this research could continue in student affairs, I would also like to have this research extended to a more general study of *phronetic* leadership. I think that it is important to challenge the acceptance of approaches to leadership that do not consider the importance of ethics, character, and values; or if these are considered, the moral philosophy of a proposed approach to leadership may not be critically considered. Many descriptions of leadership simplify what it means to be a leader, and I think problematically describe leadership as something that can be

achieved through a prescriptive set of skills, traits, or exposure to specific kinds of knowledge. I view *phronetic* leadership as a complex and never-ending process in which one must commit to a sustained engagement. There are no number of steps that can be laid out in a manual, a book, or a podcast that one can follow in order to learn to be an ethical leader. Therefore, I argue that the study of *phronetic* leadership is necessary across other contexts, and the narratives of other leaders must be presented in ways that can consider *phronetic* leadership and the complexities of leaders' lived experiences.

Implications

Conducting this study has had implications on my own practice as a higher education administrator, as I recognize that I have changed as a leader. While I do not currently work in a student affairs capacity in higher education, the practice implications are not limited to a single functional area of administration. Throughout this process I have recognized new moments of reflexive pause in my practice. Often these would come after I was writing or reading in the morning, before going to work, and I would need to make a decision later that day that was then informed by my philosophical reflections from the morning; I have found myself attempting to embody the philosophy of Aristotle and Foucault, as well as the wisdom shared by the participants, when making decisions as a higher education administrator. This is evident when I find myself incorporating new language that demonstrates an adoption of different forms of logic. I have intentionally tried to focus my practice in a manner that helps me learn how one can attempt to practice and develop as a *phronetic* leader. My awareness of statements, terms, and practices that I previously accepted as forms of common sense are often now overlaid by a skeptical lens that is enhanced by a philosophical framework that is informed by the works of Aristotle and Foucault. The implications are that I do not think I can practice in some of the same

ways in which I did previously; at least I do not think I can practice in the same way without being aware of the influence of dominant forms of rationality and relations of power on my individual practices. This does not mean that the effects of my practice will or can always realize different ends, but I recognize that I have been marked intellectually, philosophically, and ethically by an altered awareness. I will continue to develop as an ethical leader, as my development as an ethical leader did not begin or end with this study; however, my approach to leadership is now different, and I am happier with an improved ability to reflect on the *how* and *why* of my practice. My awareness that *phronetic* leadership is a continual process—rather than an endpoint—will be a lasting implication of this study, and for that I am grateful. The work of developing one’s skill, knowledge, character dispositions, and wisdom as a *phronetic* leader is never done.

Universal truths were not sought, so broad theoretical claims should not be interpreted as being claimed through the findings of this study. What was sought was to complicate the understanding of what it means to serve as a Senior Student Affairs Officer, as well as how individuals who demonstrate *phronetic*-like leadership describe their experiences as leaders. Final or universal answers cannot be found through this study, therefore the study should not be read as suggesting such. There are important implications of the study that if considered carefully should inform current and future practice by Senior Student Affairs Officers. I suggest that current Senior Student Affairs officers engage in reflexive practice, which should include asking questions that relate to equity, relations of power, and the values of the community in which they practice. The initial challenge faced by leaders wishing to engage in reflexive practice is to prioritize the time to engage in such activity, which means that habits must be established for the long-term engagement in this practice. This can include building a community

of friends and mentors who engage in reflexive practice. Further, a focus on how administrative and educational practices can be considered through a lens that is mission-oriented and values-conscious is critical when considering the impact of practices. Nothing will actually change if the rationality that informs such practices is not assessed truthfully, which should include a recognition that many practices exist not because they are the most equitable or the most ethical; rather, the practices have become norms that have been established and perpetuated with an appearance of common sense.

I will not suggest that any of these implications lead to easy answers; instead, I will suggest that the work of engaging in these different ways is more difficult than adhering to the status-quo. However, the flourishing of a person who serves as a *phronetic* leader within their community of practice is a flourishing that I argue cannot exist through other approaches to leadership; those other approaches to leadership may understand leadership as a skill set that can exist in a vacuum separate from one's character, community values, and unique contexts. Also, while *phronetic* leadership may be more difficult than adhering to the status quo, the benefits of living in such a way is that it is indicative of living a good life—as was described by Aristotle. A *phronetic* leader is an individual who seeks balance in their life and who seeks the virtuous action in all that they do.

In addition to the implication for individual Senior Student Affairs Officers, there are implications that should be understood as relating to a community's selection of SSAO leaders, as well as the development of individuals' character who are likely to serve as Senior Student Affairs Officers in the future. The selection of Senior Student Affairs Officers for positions within institutions of higher education should involve an in-depth consideration of the candidates' values and character, as these are predispositions that serve as indicators of *phronetic*

leadership. This selection should include thorough consideration and review of the higher education institution's values in which the Senior Student Affairs Officer would serve, and the candidates' past practical experience within similar institutions. I have found myself adopting this approach in recent years, for any search process, as my questions include an attempt to become aware of the candidate's values and character dispositions. An absence of awareness regarding one's values and character dispositions becomes more evident the more these questions are practiced, and my experience has been that candidates either are often unprepared for these questions or welcome them as an opportunity to be evaluated in a way that can highlight strengths that are often not assessed. Candidates' educational backgrounds should be weighed (with a prioritization of an educational background that includes philosophical rigor), skills and demonstrated technical competence should be explored, and the reputation that exists in the field of the candidates' (from past supervisors, colleagues, and students) should be considered as it relates to an assessment of the default leadership approaches of the candidates (e.g. how are they described as a leader, and by whom?). Care and planning must be taken when thinking through the questions that can provide the best opportunity for responses that can be interpreted as pertaining to the candidates' skills, knowledge, wisdom, and character dispositions.

This study also provides implications for graduate preparatory programs, professional associations, and professionals in the field who supervise student employees, graduate assistants, and new professionals. Technical rationality can contribute to a lack of focus on developing the right kind of character dispositions, through experience, in future generations of leaders. Recognizing the immediate and lasting effects of a discourse on practices is an area in which individuals and various communities of practice must maintain vigilance to challenge the slow

and unconscious creep of common sense in practices. I am skeptical that such a turn will happen broadly; however, the ripple effect of individuals engaging in reflexive practice and challenging the common sense that supports uncritical practices should not be dismissed as being unimportant. In fact, I argue that the everyday micro decisions and micro ethical actions by an individual are forms of resistance against existing as a leader who is underaware of ethical consequence. It is vital that the opportunities to learn through experience are provided for younger individuals to develop practical wisdom; the goal is that these future leaders may lead in a way that is technically competent, yet not solely technical. Those leaders who recognize the importance of developing *phronetic* leadership should prioritize time to mentor less-experienced professionals and students who demonstrate the predispositions of a *phronetic* leader. This mentorship is a vital component of giving truthful, critical, and supportive feedback to the professionals who are developing their skills, knowledge, and practical wisdom through experience. Without the feedback of a wise mentor it is less likely that their practice will align with a standard of excellence that is values-conscious and informed by a *phronetic* framework.

Phronetic leadership is an ideal that will not and cannot be practiced without the presence of the right conditions, resources, and character dispositions. I believe that the process of developing technically rational leaders is easier than the process of developing *phronetic* leaders (e.g. the process of developing technically rational leaders is more efficient). The problems that leaders within higher education communities face are complex and evolving; therefore, these communities are better served by leaders who can put means and ends in conversation in order to make decisions that are the most effective in the context of a specific time and place. Therefore, I call for a commitment to resisting the effects of discourses that devalue *phronetic* leadership, for these discourses have problematic ethical consequences for the higher education communities

that contribute to the development of values and awareness in students who are citizens of other communities. Leaders must continually ask questions regarding, who wins and who loses, and by which mechanisms of power?; what must be done, if anything?; and where do we go from here? These are questions that I suggest can and should be asked by Senior Student Affairs Officers throughout the process of becoming *phronetic* leaders.

Phronetic leaders learn cyclically by making decisions as a leader and then through the dynamic process of *phronetic* leadership their wisdom is constantly, “reconstructed and enriched,” and the more that the lived experience of the *phronetic* leader is reconstructed in this way, “the more sensitive and insightful phronesis becomes—or, rather, the more the experiencer becomes a phronimos” (Dunne, 1993, p. 293). So, *phronetic* leadership is necessarily always changing and transforming in relation to the leader’s character dispositions, community context, and wisdom. A *phronetic* leader must develop a Foucauldian understanding of power, as it is impossible to know what is practicably achievable in action and the least oppressive without the ability to analyze power in this way. A *phronetic* leader must also commit to living and leading in a virtuous manner. Leading and living virtuously necessitates refining one’s character dispositions by weighing the virtue of actions as being excessive or deficient, thinking in the grey, humbly expanding one’s awareness of context, considering ethical consequence, grounding one’s decisions in the values of the community, constantly honing one’s skills, gaining new knowledge, skeptically analyzing common sense practices, and refining one’s wisdom through reflexive practice.

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APPENDIX A

Interview One Interview Questions

- Can you tell me about your experiences in student affairs? I'm particularly interested in your story as it relates to how you came to be interested in a career in student affairs.
- What about student affairs as a field and the Senior Student Affairs Officer role drew/draws your interest? How does this work align with your values, skills, and knowledge?

Interview Two Interview Questions

- How has your understanding of ethics been shaped by your experiences in student affairs?
- How has your understanding of leadership been shaped by your experiences in student affairs?
- How would you describe what it means to be an ethical leader as a Senior Student Affairs Officer, and can you provide any specific examples from your experiences that you think would help explain your understanding through a richer description?

Interview Three Interview Questions

- Can you describe what your historical understanding of the SSAO position is, from the current ways that the position is described and understood to positions that preceded it within higher education?
- How do you view the role of the SSAO as it relates to U.S. higher education?

- How has your understanding of the SSAO position shifted or evolved over time?
- In what ways do you think the roles and responsibilities will continue to evolve for the SSAO, and in what ways would you hope that the position could evolve—as it is understood by various individuals and groups in higher education (i.e., students, professional associations, graduate preparatory programs, university presidents, state government, federal government)?
- Do you view the role of the Senior Student Affairs Officer as a political role? If you do, can you attempt to explain how and why you understand it in such a way, as well as what you mean by political?
- What role do you think an SSAO should play in the development of graduate assistants, new professionals, and middle managers who fall within their purview of leadership? Further, what do you think is realistic regarding what these groups of individuals may expect from the SSAO?
- What do you think student affairs professional associations do well, and what do you think needs to be improved on by these associations as it relates to looking to the future of the field?
- How has the field of student affairs changed over the span of your career, and how do you predict it will change in the future?

Interview Four Interview Questions

- What kind of information do you need in order to make a decision as an SSAO?

- Where and how do you get the information you need to make the best decision as an SSAO?
- What practices assist you in maintaining access to these kinds of information?
- How would you describe the experience of attempting to abide by federal and state laws, institutional policy, and professional codes of ethics, while also acting in accordance with your own understanding of ethics and morality?
- Can you talk about your experiences with institutional and divisional assessment, as well as any ways you have seen practices change over time, or as you have worked at different institutions?
- How do you come to understand the values of the institutions and divisions for which you have worked, as well as the acceptable practices according to these values?
- Have you ever attempted to influence the values that are recognized or prioritized within these communities?

Interview Five Interview Questions

- Decisions differ greatly in scale and scope. Can you talk about the different kinds of decisions one has to make as an SSAO, and how they can differ in scale, as well as the number of individuals or groups that are impacted by said decision?
- Are there examples you feel comfortable sharing where you felt you could not make the decision you felt was most right, due to factors that you felt were outside your control? How did these experiences influence you as a leader and potentially influence your approach as a leader and decision-maker?

- What role do you think practical wisdom plays in decision making, and what role do you think it should play?
- Can you talk about how you attempted to balance supervising departments that have such seemingly different kinds of work that the staff do in these areas do, which may give the appearance of differing missions?
- Can you describe what your experience has been like while participating in this study?
- What has been challenging about this experience, and what have you enjoyed about it?
- Do you think that this experience has been beneficial?
- What would you like to make sure that I am aware of as it relates to all the topics we have discussed, as well as what you would like others to consider about these topics?

APPENDIX B



June 8, 2017

Hawken Brackett
Department of ELPTS
College of Education
Box 870122

Re: IRB#: 17-OR-195 "Senior Student Affairs Officers' Ethical Leadership"

Dear Hawken Brackett:

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board has granted approval for your proposed research.

Your application has been given expedited approval according to 45 CFR part 46. Approval has been given under expedited review category 7 as outlined below:

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

Your application will expire on June 7, 2018. If your research will continue beyond this date, complete the relevant portions of the IRB Renewal Application. If you wish to modify the application, complete the Modification of an Approved Protocol Form. Changes in this study cannot be initiated without IRB approval, except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to participants. When the study closes, complete the appropriate portions of the IRB Request for Study Closure Form.

Please use reproductions of the IRB approved stamped consent forms to provide to your participants.

Should you need to submit any further correspondence regarding this proposal, please include the above application number.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,



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