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Examining the Experiences of the Hearing Officer in the College Student Conduct Process

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Examining the Experiences of the Hearing Officer in the College Student Conduct Process

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Approvals

In the judgment of the following signatories, this Dissertation meets the academic standards that have been established for the Doctor of Philosophy degree.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to all the student affairs professionals who are constantly working to adapt their practices to meet student needs.

And to Liam.

ABSTRACT

Student conduct is one of the most important aspects of student life on a college campus. The staff members who serve as conduct hearing officers play an important role in helping students recognize their rights and responsibilities in the campus community and overcome poor decision making. There is a need to study the experiences of hearing officers to inform the development of consistent and effective training for those performing this role on college campuses. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological dissertation was to understand the lived experiences of the hearing officers, specifically in regard to the training that they have received to fulfill their roles. Grounded in the Human Resources Approach and the Strategic Training of Employees Model, research questions explored the training of conduct officers, goals of student conduct, and the influence of institutional process on conduct hearing officers, as well as the lived experiences of the conduct officers. Data were collected from 34 residence hall directors who also served as hearing officers. From these participants, five were selected to engage in semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis of the questionnaire responses and data from semi-structured interviews resulted in 24 findings. The findings demonstrated that hearing officers want additional training to provide students a more meaningful experience, and higher-level guidance on the design of educational sanctions for their students. Recommendations include establishing national training standards, implementing additional assessment for both hearing officers and students, and exploring a range of approaches to student conduct, such as restorative justice.

Key words: employee training, hearing officers, student affairs, student conduct, students' rights and responsibilities.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Student affairs professionals in higher education work to support students throughout their college years (Baxter Magolda, 2009; Blimling, 2015). One of their responsibilities is to guide students through educational experiences that will aid their intellectual development. Common areas represented in the division of student affairs include student involvement, career services, athletics, and residence life and housing (Blimling, 2015).

Living in a residential community can provide a student an opportunity to learn to live with others (Blimling, 2015). Furthermore, living among others in a communal space can instill many of the life skills that students will apply later (Blimling, 2015). Residence life staff members help guide students through these situations by using mediation skills, active listening, and the development of programs and services to aid students in having a successful residential experience (Bryant et al. 2018).

Having spent 15 years working in residence life, I have helped thousands of students to navigate living with others. As a staff member working in the residence life department, I served as a conduct hearing officer for 16 years. I know from my growth in the role that the more experienced I was in the hearing officer process, the more comfortable I felt. At the start of my career, I approached my role in a very formulaic way. I found myself going over the facts and asking students to agree or disagree, and then assigning sanctions, therefore resolving the case. I was doing most of the talking, and the students merely answered the questions that I asked them. It became evident that I was approaching student conduct as a task-centered activity, as opposed to a learning opportunity. As I spent more time in this role, I found myself listening to the stories students told and challenging them to reflect on their actions. I learned to listen more than talk.

This change in approach brought more substantive conversations and, ultimately, I was better able to respond to the needs of the student, knowing how hard it can be to break down walls with students and engage them in an uncomfortable conversation. I have felt the frustration of working with students who were too stubborn, or not developmentally ready, for the lesson they needed to learn. I have sat with students as they realize the consequence of their actions, the impact of those consequences on others, and the rewards associated with the changes made.

It is important that universities provide training and guidance to their hearing officers to support them in effectively making a connection with students (Blimling, 2015; Bryant et al., 2018). Looking back on my experience has given me the desire to learn more about the way hearing officers are trained and prepared to take on this important role. I wanted to hear from people serving in this role and how they are prepared to serve as conduct officers. By reflecting on the experience, we can learn what is currently working, how these lessons are being learned, and how we can improve the process.

Background and Context

All colleges and universities have a responsibility to address student behavior (King, 2012; Howell, 2005; Baxter Magolda, 2009). At most residential colleges, the primary hearing officers are the live-in hall management staff, who often carry the title of resident director (Blimling, 2015). The residence hall director is, for the most part, an entry-level position. These professionals are responsible for the well-being of the students in their residence hall. They supervise student staff in the residence halls, coordinate all programming and educational efforts within the hall, and act as a resource for the students in their residence hall (Blimling, 2015; Bryant et al, 2018). They also typically serve as hearing officers and address violations of the student conduct code.

Considering the important work that resident directors do, the field of student affairs has not developed a standard or consistent curriculum for training individuals who take on the role as a hearing officer (Lancaster & Waryold, 2008). Much of the training provided focuses on the practical process of managing a hearing, as opposed to the educational opportunities presented in a conduct hearing (Crocker, 2020; Mahnke, 2016). Part of the reason for this is there is no standard preparation for an individual taking on the resident director's role. Some individuals step into this role having completed a master's degree in student affairs, or student development, whereas others have completed a master's degree in another discipline (Waryold, 1998; Crocker, 2020). Others may have only bachelor's degrees in a wide variety of undergraduate majors. There are no direct college undergraduate majors for those seeking a career in student affairs. This means that each college or university designs its own training for the hearing officer staff.

The training hearing officers receive will often vary from campus to campus (Crocker, 2020). Those who step into the resident director role with an advanced degree in student affairs or student development may have some training in counseling, mediation, or a psychological basis for understanding student needs. Research suggests that before taking on the role of a hearing officer, it would be beneficial to train for and practice certain skills, such as conflict resolution, along with mediation (Fischer & Maatman, 2008). Other literature suggests that practice is the best way to learn and prepare, and that skills such as active learning, open mindedness, sound judgement, and the ability to think outside the box will be learned through being a hearing officer (Lancaster & Waryold, 2008; Bryant et al., 2018).

Glick and Degess-White (2019) studied the professional identity of hearing officers, including their training, skills, and experience, to see if the specialized training and practice defined student conduct administration as a unique career field. The researchers found that student conduct work meets eight out of the ten criteria to be identified as a unique career field (Glick & Degges-White, 2019). The authors identified four areas in which hearing officers must excel: investigatory skills, conflict resolution, legal knowledge, and developmental theory. The authors further argued that training for hearing officers should focus on those four skill areas, for individuals to succeed in that position.

Glick and Degges-White (2019) surveyed 329 student hearing officers who held a master's degree and were serving as hearing officers. Participants completed a 27-step survey on their training and ability to stay up to date on current trends in student affairs. The authors found a positive correlation between the length of time in the profession and all four areas identified as necessary for the success of a hearing officer. The researchers also found a strong correlation between hearing officers who participated in additional training and development and those with a positive outlook on their professional role. Glick and Degges-White (2019) stated that proper training and preparation are essential to success as a conduct hearing officer. The researchers recommended that graduate programs in student affairs should update their curricula to more accurately reflect the skills needed to succeed in the profession.

Developing consistent training for hearing officers can be difficult (Crocker, 2020). Individuals serving as hearing officers may have completely different skills and experience from those of others who serve in the same capacity. Moreover, graduate degree programs in student affairs differ from university to university (Glick & Degges-White, 2019). Additional complications come from the expectations of entry-level professionals. Young professionals and those seeking entry-level positions tend to want positions with high student contact and more positive engagement (Burkard et al., 2005). Areas such as student conduct, with its negative connotation, may not be as easily embraced by young professionals, as they may have a misunderstanding about the lack of autonomy in serving as a conduct hearing officer (Glick & Degges-White, 2019; Haug, 2018).

A major problem with developing consistent training is each institution has its own conduct process and expectations and may design it to reflect that process (Lancaster & Waryold, 2008). Another concern is that the laws that guide student conduct administration change rapidly, and institutions must adapt their processes, often with very little notice (Haug, 2018; Lancaster & Waryold, 2008). Concerns about liability often dictate that more formulaic practices be exercised in student conduct, which is contrary to the student development focus that most young professionals bring to the position (Crocker, 2020; Haug, 2018).

Despite its importance in the administration of the student experience, there is very little consistency in the preparation of student hearing officers. Taking into account the varied educational backgrounds of the individuals who take on student conduct roles, and the unique processes that exist on each college campus, I wanted to listen to hearing officers about their experiences and how they were prepared to take on this role.

Statement of the Problem

The emphasis on student development, rather than punishment in the student conduct process, has been an essential piece of student affairs for decades (Daniels, 1997; Karp & Sacks, 2014). The staff members who act as hearing officers have an important but challenging role in this process. Those who serve as hearing officers often occupy roles as entry-level generalists with a range of responsibilities, only one of which is to serve as a hearing officer. The hearing officer must reinforce the values and expectations of the university and provide an individualized experience to allow the students to consider their negative behavior. With time commitments, and multiple tasks each day, this can be a challenge to accomplish. The hearing officer must resolve the case in a timely manner, firmly reinforce university policies, but also support the student's growth and development. This can make for a difficult juggling act (Karp & Sacks, 2014; Lancaster & Waryold, 2008).

The problem is that there is no consistency within student affairs for preparing hearing officers to serve in this role. To understand the lived experiences of hearing officers, it is important to clarify university expectations regarding residential student behavior and typical policies regarding misbehavior or violations of policy. It is also essential to delineate the different types of conduct hearings that a university may employ to achieve its goals for developing the whole student. Finally, it is necessary to understand the complex task of initiating, implementing, and assessing the outcome of the conduct hearing.

While research conducted in student conduct continues to grow, very few studies asked the hearing officers to describe their experiences. Fischer and Maatman (2008) stated that to be an effective hearing officer, individuals need to be well versed in legal knowledge and policy, as well as education and student development. Bryant et al. (2008) argued that certain skill sets such as social skills, communication skills, and the ability to work well with others can contribute to successful hearing officer preparation.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to investigate the lived experiences of student hearing officers across various areas of the United States. Given that there is no national standard for training in the area of student conduct, I wanted to explore more deeply this topic of training hearing officers. I wanted a better understanding of how hearing officers apply the employer-provided training they receive, and how they build on their experiences to inform future decision making. Since my subjects are professionals involved in the student conduct process day to day, I wanted to learn more about their perceptions of that process, and their role in executing it. To reach this goal, the research questions for this project were as follows:

RQ1: How are hearing officers trained for their roles?

RQ2: Do hearing officers feel that the practice of student conduct in their university is meeting the goals of developing the whole student including character, values, and life skills?

RQ3: What is the lived experience of the hearing officer?

RQ4: What institutional processes influence the hearing officers' experience?

Overview of Research Design

To explore the lived experiences of hearing officers, a qualitative, phenomenological approached was used. Qualitative research is appropriate when attempting to research specific experiences or individuals (Maxwell, 2013; Wertz, 2011). Maxwell (2013) also emphasized that qualitative research is supportive of an inquiry that seeks to explain and understand experiences, events, and actions. A qualitative approach seemed the most appropriate research method for understanding the lived experience of hearing officers.

A phenomenological study seeks to understand how people with a shared experience view the world around them (Creswell, 2013; Kaufer & Chemero, 2015). Studies of this sort focus on the individual's subjective experience and attempt to reduce it to a universal truth (Creswell, 2013). In addition, phenomenology focuses on what the subjects experienced, and how they experienced it (Wertz, 2011). Phenomenology was the best fit for my study, as I sought to understand the lived experiences of individuals who serve as hearing officers.

Subjects for this research project were resident directors who served as hearing officers and were employed in colleges and universities across the United States. Thirty-five individuals participated in the study. Purposive sampling was used to select the research sample. This sampling allows the researcher to select the most information-rich cases and grants the researcher access to data appropriate for the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Specifically, I engaged in criterion sampling, which allows the researcher to select respondents that meet certain criteria (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

To collect my data, I used two different methods. The first was a questionnaire, administered through Qualtrics. Questionnaires are best used when attempting to gather data from a group that may be spread out over a large geographical area (Maxwell, 2013). Questionnaires are also helpful in describing characteristics and experiences of a sample of respondents at a given time (Mertens, 2015). Therefore, I felt a questionnaire would benefit my study by getting feedback from a number of hearing officers. The second data collection method consisted of individual interviews. Josselson (2013) stated, “The aim of interview is to document people’s experience, self-understanding, and working models of the world they live in, so that we may later attempt to make meaning of these phenomena” (p. 2). By utilizing interviews as a research technique, I was able to learn from the subjects themselves how they view the world around them. Maxwell (2013) stated that when researchers attempt to understand a subject, the questions that they ask are the instrument they are using. Conducting interviews with hearing officers seemed the best way to solicit information, since I was attempting to gather information on their lived experiences.

After collecting the data, I organized and prepared the data, which included transcribing the interviews, and sorting all other data into specific types. I read over the data to reflect on the meaning of the information that I collected and analyzed it by reviewing responses and searching for common themes that were color-coded. Coding qualitative data allows the researcher to identify themes and experiences that demonstrate a common experience (Maxwell, 2013).

Interviews were voice recorded, and transcribed. The transcripts were then reviewed for common themes, which were also color coded, and read multiple times to make sure that each common theme or experience was identified.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions were used in this study:

Student conduct process (also known as the hearing process) refers to a one-on-one meeting between a full-time staff member and the student who has been perceived to have violated a university policy. After the discussion between the hearing officer and the student, an outcome is decided, and educational sanctions, if necessary, are assigned to the student (Karp & Sacks, 2014).

Sanction is a term used to describe an activity a student is asked to complete after the hearing is over, and before the case can be closed. These sanctions often reflect the violation committed by the student (Karp & Sacks, 2014).

Hearing officer refers to the student affairs professional who leads the conduct hearings and guides the student through the conversation (Lancaster & Waryold, 2008).

Resident director describes a full-time staff member who lives and works within a residential life office on a college campus (Blimling, 2015).

Significance of the Study

As there are currently no standard processes for training hearing officers, understanding their lived experiences can assist with discovering gaps in current training. There was no research found focusing on hearing officers' opinions of their existing or future training preparation, or if the kind of training they did receive adequately prepared them to take on this role (Bryant et al., 2018).

In order to ensure that their services have the desired impact, student affairs practitioners must work to evaluate their practices (Bryant et al., 2018). By gaining a better sense of hearing officers' experiences, the chances of improving practices in student affairs might increase. It is hoped that improved practices make students leaving these hearings more satisfied with their experiences and feeling that they learned something in the process, which may lead to fewer violations occurring on campus.

The results of this study could contribute to current literature regarding preparation of hearing officers. The question related to the training of hearing officers is not addressed in existing studies or dissertations. Bryant et al. (2018) argued that preparation and training of hearing officers are necessary for the success of the residential community. The authors recommended that universities design and provide more structured training to their hearing officers.

By examining the experiences of the hearing officers and providing them the support and resources that they need to be successful, universities may find that they are losing fewer staff to burnout. As a result, hearing officers may be more engaged in their work, which may inspire increased student satisfaction and turn out more productive and engaged citizens.

Chapter Summary and Outline

This dissertation is divided into five chapters. This first chapter begins with an introduction to my personal journey as a hearing officer, reflecting on my first few years merely serving as an administrator in that role, to when I learned to be an educator, and engage students in the conversation. I then wrote about the training of hearing officers, and the current lack of consistency in preparing student affairs professionals as hearing officers.

In Chapter Two, I conducted a review of relevant literature, which helps to frame the study. This review included a thorough examination of the literature which includes the theoretical framework, identified as the Human Resources approach, and the conceptual framework, the Strategic Training of Employees Model. I also discussed the history of student conduct, and the contemporary use of student conduct.

Chapter Three presents an overview of the methodology. Included in this chapter is a review of the qualitative approach and phenomenological research, the selection and recruitment of participants, as well as the data collection methods and data analysis methods. Chapter Three will also cover ethical considerations.

Chapter Four presents the findings of the study. They are organized according to the two data collection methods, and then aligned with the research question. Chapter Five provides some discussion of the data collected, conclusions that I have drawn, the implications of how this research will impact student conduct administration, and recommendations for future research, as well as final thoughts on the research conducted.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

All colleges and universities have a responsibility to address student behavior (Baxter Magolda, 2009; Howell, 2005; King, 2012). While seeking to obtain a greater understanding of the hearing officers' experience, I first needed a better understanding of employees' relationships to their employer, as well as how essential training can be to future success. I then wanted to gain a better grasp of student conduct process and its history, the current trends within conduct, and how hearing officers are currently trained by their organization.

Organization of Chapter

This chapter provides a discussion of the theoretical framework: the human resources approach. Next, I review studies that use elements of the human resources approach. Then, I discuss the Strategic Training of Employees Model (STEM), including the history of STEM, as well as application of the STEM model to student conduct work. After that, I begin by providing a history of student conduct, as well as relevant background information on student conduct. Next, I discuss the conduct hearing officer position, and review the skills required to be successful in this role. I then discuss different types of conduct hearings, as well as the importance of educational sanctions in the conduct process. Finally, I review contemporary issues such as recent research conducted in hearing officer training and preparation, restorative justice hearings, social justice in student conduct, and current training methods for hearing officers.

Process of Collecting Literature

The process through which information was obtained in relation to student conduct, as well as the Human Resources Approach, started with key word searches. I began by using key phrases that included, but were not limited to: conduct officer, conduct process in colleges, hearing officers, hearing officers training, hearing officer preparation, training, employee development, collaborative decision-making, and employee engagement. ProQuest, ERIC, EBSCOHOST, and Google Scholar were all used when searching for results from these keywords. Sources included peer-reviewed journal articles, books, qualitative and quantitative studies, and other dissertations.

Theoretical Framework

The Human Resources Approach is the theory that best grounds my research. It was developed by Miles (1965), who believed that for organizations to succeed, it was essential that they invest in their employees.

Human Resources Approach

Understanding how employees influence the organization which they are a part of falls under the Human Resources Approach theory (Miles, 1965). The Human Resources Approach declared that there were two types of leadership, the first being the human relations approach. This approach takes a top-down view and is based on the belief that organizations should make decisions and the employees abide by decisions dictated to them by the management. Human resources, the second type of leadership, takes a different view and believes that employers need to invest in their employees. Miles felt that the goal of every organization should be to foster employees' potential and ideas, and cultivate creativity and risk taking in the hopes of organizational success and employee investment and retention. Miles (1965) believed that every employee has untapped potential that needs to be harvested for the benefit of the business.

Miles began working at University of California-Berkeley in 1963 and was teaching courses in Industrial Relations and Organizational Psychology (Lincoln et al., 2020). He was one of the first researchers to put forward the position that employees were assets to a company and needed to be treated as such. He spent his career teaching and writing about how companies can be most effective while engaging their employees.

Miles (1965) believed that it was necessary that employees play a role in every decision, and therefore, he emphasized the importance of communication from management to employees in any organization. Miles (1965) described participatory decision-making as a process where employees who will be most impacted by the decision participate in forming it. Whereas in many cases managers may make higher-level decisions on their own, human resources theory holds that participatory decision-making benefits the organization. This theory also suggests that employees be constantly given new and challenging experiences to improve their decision-making skills and perspective on the job.

Miles (1965) believed that allowing employees to participate in decision making would improve morale and engagement. The human resources approach actively engages employees in decision making that influences their day-to-day work. It allows employees to weigh in on decisions, which in turn will make the employees feel more valued and in control of their work. Miles (1965) also believed that by having employees who are empowered to make decisions, they would be more engaged in their work, and this will help employers to retain quality employees.

Current Studies Using Human Resources Approach

There were no studies found in which the human resources approach was applied. However, elements of the human resources approach, such as participatory decision making and employee engagement and its relationship to retention, have been studied.

Participatory Decision-Making One such study of participatory decision making between employees and employers was conducted by Li and Qian (2016). The authors examined the relationship between employers and employees at two different hotel chains in China. Li and Qian spoke with 57 supervisors and 248 of the staff that directly reported to them, to collect information related to the number of employees who were seeking feedback from their supervisors in the workplace.

Li and Qian (2016) conducted a quantitative study to gather their data. Participants were given a survey in which they were asked to rate on a Likert scale area such as the ability to participate in decision making, psychological ownership of their work, and feedback from supervisors. The authors found positive correlations between employee participatory decision making and seeking feedback from employers. The more the employees felt that they were allowed to make decisions regarding their day-to-day work, the more they sought feedback on how they could improve their performance. Li and Qian found that if employees felt that they had some ownership over the direction of their work, they were more likely to feel invested and engaged in the work. The authors found that, by including employees in the decision-making that influences their day-to-day work, employers at both hotel chains are increasing the investment that the employees have within their organization.

Abdulai and Shafiwu (2014) also studied participatory decision making. The authors conducted a mixed-methods study of participatory decision making and its relationship to employee productivity in two community banks in Ghana. The authors used two data collection methods, the first being a 40-item questionnaire containing both open and closed questions. The authors also engaged in individual interviews, asking ten questions. A total of 80 responses were received from the two data collection methods.

Abdulai and Shafiwu (2014) wanted to conduct a study on participatory decision-making, as they recognized a trend of higher-up decision-making leading to employee protests and strikes. By engaging in participatory decision-making, the authors felt this approach could reduce the number of strikes and could improve employee engagement. Studies have shown that globally, fewer than 5% of organizations engage in participatory decision-making (Abdulai & Shafiwu, 2014).

Out of the 80 respondents, 74 answered that being involved in decision-making improved their level of investment in the organization (Abdulai & Shafiwu, 2014). When asked if this approach helped to motivate their creativity and engagement, 67 respondents said that they were more invested due to their ability to contribute to decision-making. Overall, this study shows that participatory decision-making does have a positive influence on employee productivity (Abdulai & Shafiwu, 2014).

Employee Engagement and Retention. Miles's (1965) human resources approach centers on how employers can engage employees, so that they will invest their energy and creativity in the organization and will want to stay in it. Chew and Chan (2008) conducted a qualitative study on employee engagement and retention. The authors distributed a paper and pencil questionnaire to over 800 employees from a total of nine organizations throughout Australia. In total, 457 responses were received. They were seeking additional information on employee commitment. This was a quantitative study, and respondents used a Likert scale to submit their responses (Chew and Chan, 2008).

Chew and Chan (2008) found that employees were much more likely to remain at the same place of employment if they found a strong person-organization fit. That is, the employees found that their organization cared about them, invested in them. and shared the same values.

The authors identified a strong correlation between employees' intention to stay and the recognition and autonomy that they have. Chew and Chan (2008) state that employees will remain with the organization if they feel valued and respected.

Their study aligns with the model proposed by Miles (1965). If employees feel respected and valued, they will invest more of their time, energy, and creativity in the organization. This will increase longevity at the company, and retain happier, more engaged staff members. The authors identified items essential to long-term employees such as: satisfying work environment, training and career development, good pay, rewards and recognition, good resources, and changing jobs and autonomy.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study is the Strategic Training of Employees Model (STEM). The STEM model asserts that there is a direct relationship between the training that employees receive and the success of an organization. Developed by Wentland (2001), the STEM model came from his years in the business world, as well as his research conducted as a professor of business at Holmes Community College in Jackson, Mississippi.

History of STEM Model

Wentland (2001) developed the STEM model after seeing organizations fail to professionally train and engage their employees. He stated that businesses lose sight of their goals and lose business as they expand for more profits and fail to continue to engage their staff. Wentland cited the example of the Sears company, which in the early 1980s expanded from retail into real estate and investments but saw a loss in its retail business. As the organization shifted focus from its expertise area, management lost sight of what made them a unique organization. Despite returning to a sole focus on the retail side in the early 1990s, Sears is still experiencing public relations and business struggles due to this shift (Wentland, 2014). Wentland argued that organizations must prioritize strategic planning, which would allow them to focus on their strengths and prevent drifting away from their mission.

Wentland (2001) held that by having an engaged and competent work force, businesses are investing in the staff, and helping them to grow in their positions and therefore, help build the company. He developed the STEM model to show how businesses should be investing in employees first and working to support them in their strategic planning efforts. He remarked that by focusing on employees' growth and development, it will ground the organization in what they are good at and known for and help focus their decision making (Smith & Rupp, 2004).

Strategic Training of Employees Model (STEM)

Wentland's (2001) Strategic Training of Employees Model (STEM) describes the correlation between training of employees and the success of the organization. He wrote that an organization needs four elements: (1) people, (2) a common goal, (3) a common purpose, and (4) within an organizational structure. He believes that people are the most important of these four factors, as without individuals working within the organization, the rest would not exist.

Wentland (2014) opined that organizations need to be honest about any constraints that may keep them from operating more successfully. Any attempt to design a training course must consider constraints of the organization, such as budgetary restrictions, lack of materials or equipment, or proper training facilities. Wentland further explained that being honest about organizational constraints is a necessity; not recognizing limitations does not allow organizations to meet and overcome any challenges before them (Wentland, 2001; 2014).

Wentland (2014) expounded on the idea that most work-related training falls into the "Follow Joe" model, where new employees observe a more experienced staff member and attempt to emulate their habits and performance. However, this can be a significant limitation as it does not provide checks and balances to make sure all the information is properly conveyed. If the employee serving as the role model were to forget a lesson or had learned a work-around for a policy that he/she disagreed with, he/she may pass that knowledge onto the new staff member. Recognizing that organizations have limited resources, Wentland (2001) argued that those resources must be aligned in support of training employees to support the goals set by the management of the organization.

Employee training and engagement in the workplace are central to the retention of employees (Irshad & Afridi, 2011; Sattar et al., 2015). Chew and Chan (2008) explained that employers that creative positive organizational cultures will do better at retraining their employees, and in turn, need to do less recruiting and spending on additional training. Sattar, Ahmad, and Hassan (2015) found that employee engagement and overall satisfaction with the organization were directly linked to the human resources practices exercised. Irshad and Afridi (2011) reported that organizations have an easier time retaining employees, when they feel that the organization is invested in their success.

Wentland (2014) developed the Strategic Training of Employees Model (STEM) to help overcome many of the training problems that organizations encounter today. He explained that organizations tend to look for flashy technology-focused solutions that provide short-term relief, without providing a long-term solution. He suggested that steady growth and putting employees and staff first are the best ways to accomplish this goal and remedy the shortcomings created by a quick solution. The skills and abilities of employees drive a company’s performance. Each organization should take steps to develop employees, not only to increase productivity, but to keep up with the changing needs of the market (Wentland, 2014).

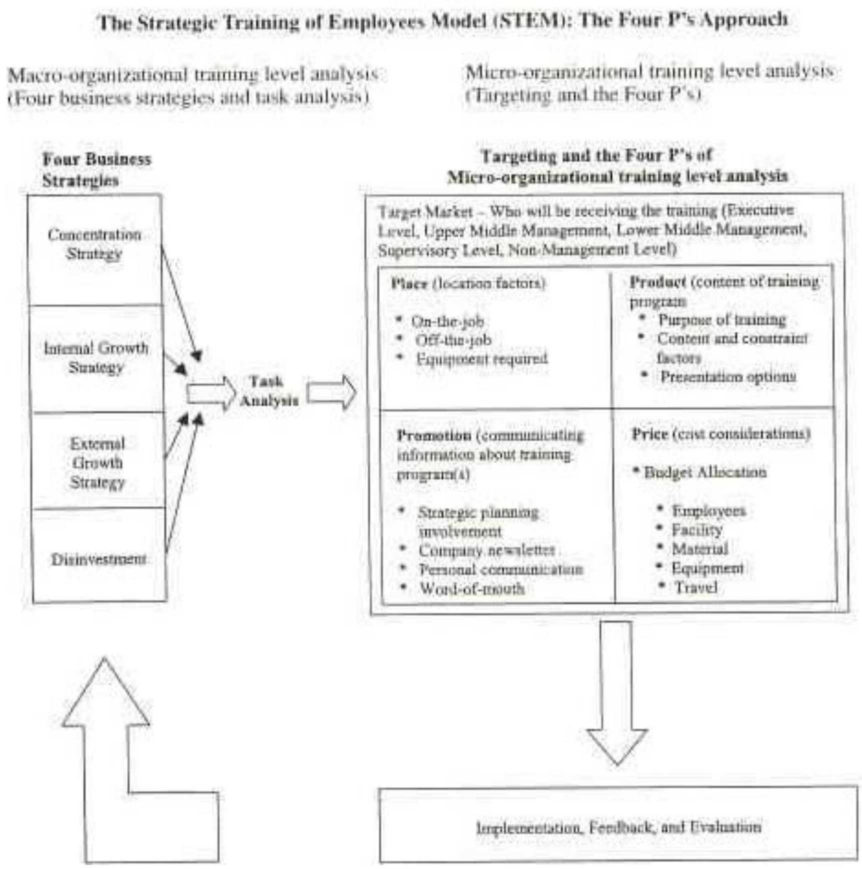
The STEM model focuses on the strategic objectives of the organization, and then on designing training and career development activities to attain these objectives (Wentland, 2001). In order to do so, the STEM has three levels. The first is the Macro Organizational Training Level. This level is where those in the highest tier of the organization review each task and how the employee is trained or prepared to take this work on. The training provided will help the employees not only learn the immediate tasks asked of them. but also increase their skills as new opportunities present themselves.

The second level of the STEM model is the micro-organizational level. Here organizations look at the tasks completed and work backwards to determine what skills the staff need to learn to complete these tasks. This can also target specific individuals or roles for additional training and support as their position demands (Wentland, 2014).

After this task analysis is complete, the final step is developing a list of jobs to be completed to support the needs and goals of the organization. The final step can begin with determining who needs what kind of training, and what tasks need to be taught for each of these positions. Once this list is prepared, organizations can review the content provided for training. The STEM Model also uses four P's to help guide training decisions, labeled by Wentland (2001) as: Place, Product, Promotion, and Price. Place deals with getting the support to the individuals where they need it, where the training takes place. It can address features of the room such as its set-up and the equipment used to train. Product is about what you are selling or offering and why it is important. Promotion covers selling the product and explaining to the wider audience why to purchase it. Price deals with the cost of the training and labor (Wentland, 2014). See Figure 1 below.

Figure 1

Strategic Training of Employees Model



Note: This figure demonstrates the Strategic Training of Employees Model, along with an explanation of the Four P's. Source: Wentland, 2001.

This study utilized the STEM model due to the importance of training and preparation of hearing officers. The goal of student conduct is to provide students who have violated policy an educational experience from which they will learn and grow. Giving students an educational experience serves as the organizational goal that universities are trying to attain. Training and preparation of the hearing officers needs to be designed to meet this important goal. This research, aimed at understanding the preparation and training of hearing officers, is attempting to learn if the training is helping hearing officers prepare to meet the challenge before them.

Behavior within an Organization

Wentland (2014) expanded his theory to include behavior within an organization. Understanding the motivations and purpose of an organization can help to improve employee morale and satisfaction (Batt & Colvin, 2011; Gerhart, 2005; Wentland, 2014). Each organizational system has three components or functions: an input function where information is captured and assembled to be processed; a processing element that converts the information into output; and then output, which is data that has been processed. Wentland (2014) believes all three components must be working together to create a harmonious system.

Wentland (2014) also discussed the definition of an organizational culture. He defines culture as the way things are done within an organization. Wentland believed there are three factors that influence an organizational culture: the attitudes and practices of management and higher leadership, the organizational environment among the employees, and the tasks being performed.

The attitudes of leadership can have a significant impact on the feelings of individuals working in that organization (Wentland, 2014). If the higher leadership focuses too much on the higher-level functions of the organization and ignores the needs of the staff, then the staff can lose motivation and not focus on completing the tasks assigned to them. “A fertile breeding ground for advancing productivity and promoting organizational success can only be laid when individuals are respected for who they are and placed in positions that complement their strengths” (Wentland, 2014, p.11).

The organizational environment for employees is defined as the cooperation, favoritism and internal politics within the organization. Wentland argued that for an organization to survive and prosper, internal politics must be taken under control: “Merit must be rewarded, and favoritism is discouraged” (p.12).

The tasks that must be completed can be measured by the meaning the tasks have to the employees. Wentland (2014) said that many employees do not understand how their day-to-day tasks contribute to the overall mission of the organization. When employees feel valued and see the positive contributions that they make, then they are happier and more productive.

Wentland (2014) stated that putting employees first and planning strategically are important. He affirmed that countless businesses have lost direction when trying to expand or engage in new ventures without gaining he knowledge to be successful. Strategic planning is an essential ingredient to organizational success, as it keeps the organization focused and sets appropriate goals.

There are three ways to approach a strategic planning process, by answering the questions: Who is being satisfied, what is being satisfied and how are the needs of the customer being satisfied? Viewing these three guiding questions will keep planners focused as they view the strategic operations of a business.

Current Uses of STEM

Wentland (2014) created the STEM Model in order to solve problems. He believed that the performance of an organization is related to the training and hiring processes of its staff. Organizations who do not properly train and prepare employees for the tasks and challenges ahead are setting themselves up for failure. By incorporating STEM, organizations can better prepare themselves for the challenges ahead.

Wentland (2014) believed that STEM can provide social skills which promote communication; a strong work ethic, which encourages motivation; a goal to accomplish tasks on time; communication skills such as reading, writing, and speaking; problem solving; technical skills: and balancing training and productivity. By investing in employee success as early as their training, Wentland remarked that employees will be more actively engaged in their work. The skills such as a strong work ethic, motivation and completing tasks on time will all come from their investment and belief in the work. The language skills, problem solving and balancing between training and productivity stem from the employees' desire to improve their processes, which will contribute to the overall success of the business. The American Society for Training and Development State of the Industry Report (2004) said that organizations that understand the link between learning and performance increases are in a better position to benefit their customer base. Businesses that invest in their employees are better preparing them to meet the changing needs of the marketplace. Smith and Rupp (2004) said that Wentland's model can also encourage employees to seek out opportunities not just to train them for the task at hand, but to provide them with the soft skills that will allow them to be prepared for new challenges.

Applying STEM to Student Conduct Work

The Strategic Training of Employees model aligns well with the goals of this study, as one of the research questions focuses on how hearing officers are trained for their roles. The STEM model entails the proper training of staff, and the benefits of empowering employees to take ownership and responsibility of their day-to-day workload. By doing so, employees will be more engaged in the work, and better able to address the needs of students. The STEM model aligns well with student conduct work. Allowing hearing officers to have a voice in how the conduct process is applied would increase investment and encourage creativity.

Whereas STEM is often applied to an individual company or organization and how it trains staff members, in this study we are examining hearing officers from multiple different universities, and methods used to prepare them (Wentland, 2014). There are still many prescribed procedures, “canned” sanctions, and formulaic hearing procedures that do not allow hearing officers to take much ownership, and in fact, leave them feeling a bit stuck in the process, as they are not able to do what they think is best for the student (Crocker, 2020; Nagel-Bennett, 2010).

When looking to apply the Four P’s to the work of student conduct, one could say Place deals with where the training takes places. For student hearing officers, training could take place by observing hearings, role playing in a classroom, or reading provided materials. For product, it is teaching hearing officers that it is not only about punishing but educating and providing students the tools necessary to be successful. Promotion is about recognizing how these types of educational conversations can benefit those who receive them. It helps to provide officers with information on their role in the hearing process. Price deals with the cost of the training and labor, which is a little harder to apply. However, in this scenario, price is the investment in the hearing officers, and getting them to buy into the program, which in turn should lead to greater success with our students (Wentland, 2014).

Influence of STEM on Research Questions

The STEM model had a direct influence on the development of the research questions for this doctoral research. The research questions used in this dissertation are as follows:

RQ1.How are hearing officers trained for their roles?

RQ2. Do conduct officers feel that the practice of student conduct in their university is meeting the goals of developing the whole student including character, values, and life skills?

RQ3. What is the lived experience of the hearing officer?

RQ4. What institutional processes influence the hearing officers’ experience?

The first question asked how hearing officers are trained for their role as a hearing officer. Wentland (2014) described training that employees receive that sets the stage for future success. In this case, it is important that hearing officers understand the administrative process, as well as any abilities they have to contribute to the process. The first question relates to how hearing officers are trained to take on this role. In STEM, the training that employees receive sets them up for future success or serves as a detractor to that success. The second question focused on whether the hearing officers feel their work is meeting the goals of the conduct process. STEM sets employees up to meet the challenges of the work before them. This question aims to answer how the practice of student conduct is meeting the established goals. The third question sought information related to the overall lived experiences of hearing officers. STEM established the Four P's: place, production, promotion, and price. Place deals with the setting and environment where training takes place, product is the educational experience that can be provided to students, promotion is the benefit that students can take away from their experience in conduct, and price covers the time and investment in the preparation for the hearing officers. All four of these elements relate directly to the lived experience of the hearing officers. Finally, the last question inquired about the constraints that may be put on hearing officers as they seek success within this process. Price would also apply here, as it relates to the investment of the organization in the success of the hearing officer.

History of Student Conduct

Since the founding of higher education in America, universities have played a role in the management of student behavior (Blimling, 2015; Lancaster & Waryold, 2008). While the method of doing so has changed over the centuries, from punitive approaches to educational conversations, the fundamental goal of reinforcing community expectations and setting behavioral standards for students has remained the same (Blimling, 2015; Lancaster & Waryold, 2008).

When higher education began in the United States in the 1600s, its focus was the promotion of Christianity and morality in students (Lancaster & Waryold, 2008). Universities in the United States were places where young men of high social standing gathered in small communities to learn. Students were encouraged to develop strong relationships with faculty members (Blimling, 2015; Lancaster & Waryold, 2008). Staff and faculty, acting in the role of surrogate parents, guided their students to live moral lives and encouraged strong intellectual habits; the university was expected to act as a father to its students (Bickel & Lake, 1999). Faculty acting in the role of a parent often used corporal punishment and harsh consequences for policy violations (Bickel & Lake, 1999; Blimling, 2015).

In the 1800s, higher education shifted away from focusing on moral development (Blimling, 2015; Lancaster & Waryold, 2008). The new philosophy, which was based on the German model of higher education, supported the notion that universities should simply be in the business of creating and passing along knowledge. Moral development, which had been a fundamental part of developing students as good Christians, was no longer the concern of the faculty (Blimling, 2015; Lancaster & Waryold, 2008). According to Blimling (2015), during this time, faculty members, who had previously been responsible for addressing and mentoring students in personal and moral development, abandoned these pursuits as they focused more on students' specific academic disciplines. This content-focused approach to education led to the creation of academic departments and specializations. Faculty began to look at students as adults responsible for solving their own problems, and as a result, many colleges ended the practice of providing on-campus housing (Blimling, 2015). Faculty felt that students should be out in the world and learning responsibility or even living with families within the community to better prepare them for life after college.

As the twentieth century dawned, parents of college students and some faculty members began to question whether it would be beneficial to give students more independence (Blimling, 2015; Lancaster & Waryhold, 2008). As a result, educators began to support meeting students' social and emotional needs (Blimling, 2015; Lancaster & Waryold, 2008). Ultimately, in response to this new philosophy, the student affairs division within colleges and universities was developed to support student development and coordinate activities outside of the classroom (Lancaster & Waryold, 2008).

The change in focus on the needs of the individual student continued throughout the twentieth century. Higher education no longer focused narrowly on students' intellectual pursuits, but instead on the development of the whole person (Blimling, 2015; Lancaster & Waryold, 2008). The development of character, values and life skills is now, in the 21st century, considered as important as the intellectual development that occurs inside the classroom. As a result, it is now the responsibility of the college to guide students' development, in this larger sense, through its programs and services (Blimling, 2015; Lancaster & Waryold, 2008).

The development of the whole individual included responses to student behavior on campus (Blimling, 2015). The resident directors, as staff members who live and work in the halls, often serve in this role, enforcing the community expectations that each university has of its students. By having the leader of the community direct the conduct hearing, it reinforced the developmental approach to conduct, and the development of a positive environment for all students (Blimling, 2015).

While training for hearing officers has been inconsistent, unintentional, and vague, some literature provides insight into the skills and knowledge that will aid an individual in this role. Fischer and Maatman (2008) argued that an advanced degree is important in preparation for taking on this work. The authors felt that is the best approach to get the "working knowledge of legal, policy, developmental, and educational implications of the field" (p. 17). The authors declared that professionals need to continue to advance their knowledge by engaging in professional development opportunities and learning new methods and approaches. Fischer and Maatman (2008) believed a variety of skills are necessary for successful administration of student conduct and argued that mediation training and understanding of student development theory are helpful in preparing hearing officers.

The student affairs division within the university has become the center of this focus on developing the whole student (Blimling, 2015; Lancaster & Waryold, 2008). Activities within this division are based on a philosophy of support and providing students with the opportunities for growth. As colleges seek to address student behavior, the student conduct process has also adapted to fit this new model (Blimling, 2015; Lancaster & Waryold, 2008). Colleges today present students with opportunities to reflect and grow from their experiences, as opposed to the punitive approach in the past. The expectation for students to realize these opportunities within the student conduct process falls under the auspices of hearing officers; however, the problem is that there is no standardized or consistent training for hearing officers, which can be challenging for the hearing officers who must deal with the misconduct of students living on campus.

Background of Student Conduct

Colleges and universities each have a method for addressing student behavior (Crocker, 2020; Howell, 2005; Karp & Sacks, 2014). Higher education needs to constantly balance the responsibility to maintain a safe community and educational environment, as well as to support the individual student. Student behaviors are typically outlined in a student conduct code which acts as a guide to establishing student behaviors and expectations on campus (Dublon, 2008; Mahnke, 2016). Each institution decides which values they wish to enforce with their policies, what would constitute a violation of that policy, and how the university will respond. Some policy violations may require an institutional response in coordination with a legal one. Sexual assaults, physical assaults or drunk and disorderly behavior may lead to other entities becoming involved such as city and state law enforcement, rather than just campus policy enforcement (Stoner & Lowery, 2004; Waryold & Lancaster, 2008). Students who violate these expectations participate in the student conduct process, which is a university's primary tool to address student behavior (Waryold & Lancaster, 2008). This process typically requires students to attend a meeting to discuss their behavior, and explain their actions, while a hearing officer listens and guides them through a self-reflecting conversation. "The fundamental purpose of student conduct work is to promote growth and development in students while protecting the interests of the larger campus community" (Waryold & Lancaster, 2008, p. 8).

While the student conduct process can be designed as a semi-courtroom type proceeding, which students sometimes view as adversarial, student affairs practitioners have two goals: student development and educational sanctioning (Karp & Sacks, 2014). The student conduct process is aimed at influencing the moral and ethical development of students, while ensuring a safe environment for students to learn. Stoner and Lowery (2004) explained that while the process is similar in design to a legal proceeding, there are important differences. First, in most cases, the traditional legal proceedings of a court room do not apply for the student conduct process. The guiding principles are the behaviors and expectations laid out by the university. On the other hand, legal proceedings allow for witnesses to be called and specify rules of evidence of what can or cannot be submitted. Stoner and Lowry (2004) state that holding university proceedings to the same standards would be counterproductive in offering students a learning experience.

Criminal legal proceedings also require the accused to be found guilty beyond all reasonable doubt (Stoner & Lowry, 2004). However, most university proceedings only require a preponderance of the evidence, indicating a belief that the student more likely than not committed the violation of campus policy (Losciavo & Waller, 2017; Stoner & Cerminara, 1990). Disciplinary hearings in universities cannot issue subpoenas or require witnesses to come forward. Courts have supported the use of the preponderance of the evidence standard as an effort to support the educational mission of the university.

Within student conduct administration, the process is designed to be an experience that is consistent for all students who appear to violate policy (Giacomini & Schrange, 2009; Stoner & Lowry, 2004). However, it is important that the unique lens or story that the student brings to the proceedings is considered. Giacomini and Schrange (2009) referred to this as conflict culture. For example, a student who showed campus police disrespect during a confrontation may come from a background in which the relationship between the police and the citizens of that neighborhood is contentious. Giacomini and Schrange (2009) said that the way the campus culture is experienced can be unique to each student based upon life experiences.

The Hearing Officer

At most residential colleges, the primary hearing officers are the live-in hall management staff (Blimling, 2015; Crocker, 2020). Live-in professional staff members in any residence hall go by many titles, such as resident director, area coordinator, residence hall director, but they all perform the same type of responsibilities. The residence hall director is, for the most part, an entry-level position. These professionals are responsible for the well-being of the students in their residence hall. Moreover, their responsibilities are to supervise student staff in the residence halls, coordinate all programming and educational efforts within the hall, and act as a resource for the students in their residence hall (Blimling, 2015; Crocker, 2020). Residence hall directors typically serve as hearing officers and address violations of the student conduct code.

To reach a decision on a student's level of responsibility for a policy violation, the hearing officer will typically read all written documentation of the incident and speak to all involved students and relevant witnesses (Karp & Sacks, 2014; Lancaster & Waryold, 2008). Once the hearing officer has reviewed the information, he/she will schedule a meeting with the student. The hearing officer's aim is to help the student find meaning in the conduct hearing (Karp & Sacks, 2014; Lancaster & Waryold, 2008). Toward that end, students are often challenged to reflect on their actions and consider how they may have impacted the overall community. The most positive outcomes would be for students to see the hearing officer not as a disciplinarian, but as a mentor who cares about their experience and can support their growth (Karp & Sacks, 2014).

Beginning a conversation with a student who is charged with a conduct violation can be a challenge (Waryold & Lancaster, 2008). Students may feel embarrassed about their inappropriate behavior and may not feel comfortable discussing their inner thoughts and insecurities with someone they may have only just met, and likely regard as an authority figure (Lancaster & Waryold, 2008). The hearing officer must break through those barriers to engage the student in an honest and direct conversation. The relationship that hearing officers and students build during the hearing can have a significant impact on the success of the hearing and can affect what the student takes away from the experience (Howell, 2005; Karp & Sacks, 2014; King, 2012).

Skills Needed for Hearing officers

Preparing staff to uphold community standards and engage in behavioral interventions is one of the most important trainings for hearing officers (Bryant et al., 2018). “The issue of developing temperament–the knowledge, skills and attitudes that lend themselves to effectiveness in conduct administration–naturally leads to questions of education and preparation” (Fischer & Maatman, 2008, p.16). There is no exhaustive list of skills that staff members should have; however, learning more about conflict management and resolution is important for a conduct hearing officer. Conflict management skills can help open the lines of communication, prove that the hearing officer is actively listening to what the student has to say, and can help appropriately channel the student’s frustration with the situation. There are several conflict resolution methods such as mediation or restorative justice that hearing officers can use when appropriate (Fischer & Maatman, 2008).

Also, important to learn are mediation skills (Fischer & Maatman, 2008). These enable staff to learn to listen objectively, ask clarifying questions, and encourage students to advocate for themselves. The ability to listen in a conduct hearing is important for all hearing officers. With these skills, they can read between the lines if a student is not initially open to sharing information and learn where to “dig a little deeper” to get a better sense of the student’s experience.

Bryant, Gregory and Koch (2018) argue that the best method for preparing staff members is through practice and experience. To allow staff to gain experience with confronting policy violations, these authors suggest developing multiple scenarios for role playing. Encouraging staff to practice addressing common policy violations gives them the opportunity to apply their knowledge of policy to some real-world situations.

Bryant, Gregory and Koch (2018) offer some helpful tips for hearing officers going through training. The first is active learning, in which people learn by doing. Conduct hearing officers will be able to read policies and training materials that describe how to address student behavior. However, experiencing the hearing itself is an important part of this experience.

The second tip is that hearing officers should be taught to be open-minded and available (Bryant et al., 2018). Based upon written documentation, it can be easy to prejudge in a conduct hearing, but the ability to remain open-minded and flexible in your decision making is an important skill to have. Focus on the student as he/she is speaking and try not to think of your next question or a counter-argument to their statement; just focus your attention on them.

Fischer and Maatman (2008) suggest that an advanced degree is not required for success as a hearing officer, but it is helpful. They believe that those with knowledge of student development theories or with legal training are most effective in managing conduct hearings. The authors assert that the challenge in student conduct administration is to develop the ability of the student to comprehend the institutional standards and their violation of those norms. Understanding where the student may be developmentally can only aid the hearing officer in guiding the conversation.

Fischer and Maatman (2008) also believe that wisdom is an important skill for hearing officers to possess. They assert that sound judgement, insight, reflection, and learning are important for a hearing officer. The ability to view each student as an individual, not as just another case, is important in making sure that students receive fair treatment in the hearing process. This is often developed over time as the hearing officer meets with many students

(Crocker, 2020). These administrators then begin to understand how to best approach each student and decide the case and develop sanctions in a way that is beneficial to the individual student in front of them. The opportunities for development that hearing officers experience allow them to view students in a more appropriate context and develop stronger possibilities for solutions.

Fischer and Maatman (2008) state that knowledge of self and one's own limitations is important. They argue that student affairs administration is a fast-changing and dynamic field, and regardless of educational background, the willingness of professionals to continue to educate themselves and keep up with current trends is vitally important. Fischer and Maatman (2008) assert that knowing yourself and your personal values is helpful in understanding students and how their personal values may differ from yours, or those of your institution. Students' behavior is grounded in their own value systems and world views. They may be resistant to conforming to the expectations that the university has of them. Understanding that not every student is going to be coming from the same perspective is vitally important in student conduct administration.

Fischer and Maatman (2008) list three areas in which hearing officers must excel to be successful: knowledge, skills, and temperament. Knowledge entails understanding student developmental theory and a realization that students carry a variety of experiences with them that inform the way they look at any particular process or experience. Fischer & Maatman (2008) also emphasize that knowing the campus policies and the cultural influences of the campus that informed the development of those policies is important to understand.

The skills that successful hearing officers need as discussed by Fischer and Maatman (2008) include: (1) the ability to open a dialogue with a student and encourage the student to speak openly and honestly with someone who may be a stranger; (2) collaboration and working together as part of a team to learn from those around you; and (3) the ability to understand and interpret campus policies and effectively communicate those policies to others. Fischer and Maatman (2008) also cite the importance of listening, being flexible and able to adapt to new and changing circumstances.

Finally, Fischer and Maatman (2008) claim that temperament is essential. Practitioners should prove themselves open-minded and non-judgmental of student needs and experiences. They must be able to validate a student's belief, even if they do not share it themselves. The hearing officer needs to be open to understanding that a student may have a completely different cultural background that influences the way the student views a certain experience. Ability to empathize is another important trait in discussing temperament. This includes the skill of empathizing with a student's experience and how hard it can be for students to reach the decisions that they have made. It also includes the ability to feel sympathy for a student's developmental background, which may not have been ideal. Being able to listen and feel for their experiences will allow practitioners to have a more direct and informed conversation with the student and may lead to a deeper, more meaningful connection in the end.

The Conduct Hearing Process

Three types of conduct hearings. Every college and university may design their student conduct process differently. Karp & Sacks (2014) identified three different types of student conduct processes commonly found in universities today, each reflecting a philosophical perspective on violations and resolutions: Moral Code Hearings, Restorative-Oriented Hearings, and Restorative Justice Practice. Moral Code Hearings involve a student who has been accused of a violation meeting one-on-one with an administrator who determines the student's level of responsibility and assigns any appropriate sanctions. Restorative-Oriented hearings first determine whether a student has violated policy and then allow students to attempt to repair the harm they have caused through more positive connections with the community. These hearings are held one-on-one with an administrator, and the harmed parties are not present (Karp & Sacks, 2014). In Restorative Justice processes the accused student and the harmed party are placed in the same room in the hopes of opening a dialogue and finding a resolution (Karp & Sacks, 2014). Restorative justice hearings are non-disciplinary and aim to resolve the wrong done to the community. This research focused on what Karp and Sacks referred to as moral code hearings, but are more often named as administrative hearings, the form most commonly used in student affairs (Karp & Sacks, 2014; Stoner & Lowery, 2004). For the purposes of this research, the student conduct process will be understood to cover the hearing itself through to the completion of sanctions.

Giacomini and Schrage (2009) questioned whether the administrative hearing model is the best for students. First, they asserted that this model finds its base in traditional legal theory of guilt or innocence. A foundation in legal process ensures that students receive similar outcomes for similar violations and prioritizes the university's desire for a safe community (Giacomini & Schrage, 2009). However, this one-size-fits-all approach does not offer students the opportunity to participate in the process. For example, restorative justice allows the student who is accused of violating policy an active role in the process.

The second way that Giacomini and Schrage (2009) questioned the current adjudication model is in the assignment of sanctions. While students may participate in sanctions which serve to reinforce policy, hold students accountable, perhaps even losing their ability to be part of the campus community, the authors argued that this process lacks the ability to provide restorative justice for the students involved. Assigning sanctions designed for the masses may miss the opportunity to give the student an individual experience (Lancaster & Waryold, 2008; Waryold, 1998) However, treating all violations the same does not take into account the experiences of the individual students, and the hearing officer's ability to tailor the experience to the needs of the student (Crocker, 2020; Giacomini & Schrage, 2009).

King (2012) conducted research on how students' perception of fairness in the process, improved their overall experience in the student conduct process. King (2012) surveyed 1,884 college students who had gone through the student conduct process and asked about their experience overall. The results indicated that when students felt their hearing officer listened to their side of the story and engaged them in a conversation, even if they ultimately disagreed with the decision made, they viewed the process as fair. However, students who did not feel they were listened to and who viewed the hearing officer as someone merely repeating policy, rather than engaging in a conversation, viewed the policy as unfair. King's (2012) research illustrates the effect that the hearing officer can have on the student perception of the process. Hearing officers need to directly respond to the concerns of the student and engage them in a deeper understanding, and students will understand the benefit of the process, even if they disagree with the outcome.

Educational Sanctions

Once the hearing is concluded, if a student has been found responsible for committing a violation of the student conduct code, he/she is typically assigned sanctions as an additional opportunity for learning (Anderson et al., 2018; Crocker, 2020). There can be a range of sanctions based on the specific violations. Some sanctions require the student to make restitution to the institution, while some colleges require community service or some other method of giving back to the school (Zdziarski & Wood, 2008). Other sanctions, more educationally based, offer students a chance to continue their reflection that began in the hearing. Examples of sanctions include a reflective paper, an educational course on drug and alcohol usage, or conducting additional research and presenting this information to fellow students. Sanctions may also increase in severity if the student continues to violate policy. The hearing officer may assign more strict sanctions if the student violates the same policy repeatedly (Crocker, 2020; Zdziarski & Wood, 2008). Once the sanctions are assigned, the students are typically given a timeframe in which they are expected to complete the sanctions (Anderson et al., 2018). Once the sanctions are satisfactorily completed, the case is considered closed. Depending on the nature of the violation and the institution, students may be asked to follow up with the hearing officer.

The determination of educational sanctions in the student conduct process is an essential part of ensuring that students are learning from their experience (Anderson et al., 2018). The authors state that "sanction" often conjures the notion of a punishment or penalty being suffered by the individual. In addition, the authors identified sanctioning as the process by which mitigating factors are weighed to determine the outcome that will best address the behavior. Zdziarski and Wood (2008) state that to grow, students need to understand how their actions impact those around them and the repercussions of their actions. It is the responsibility of the hearing officer to determine the sanction that will assist their growth and understanding of the effect of their behavior (Crocker, 2020; Zdziarski & Wood, 2008).

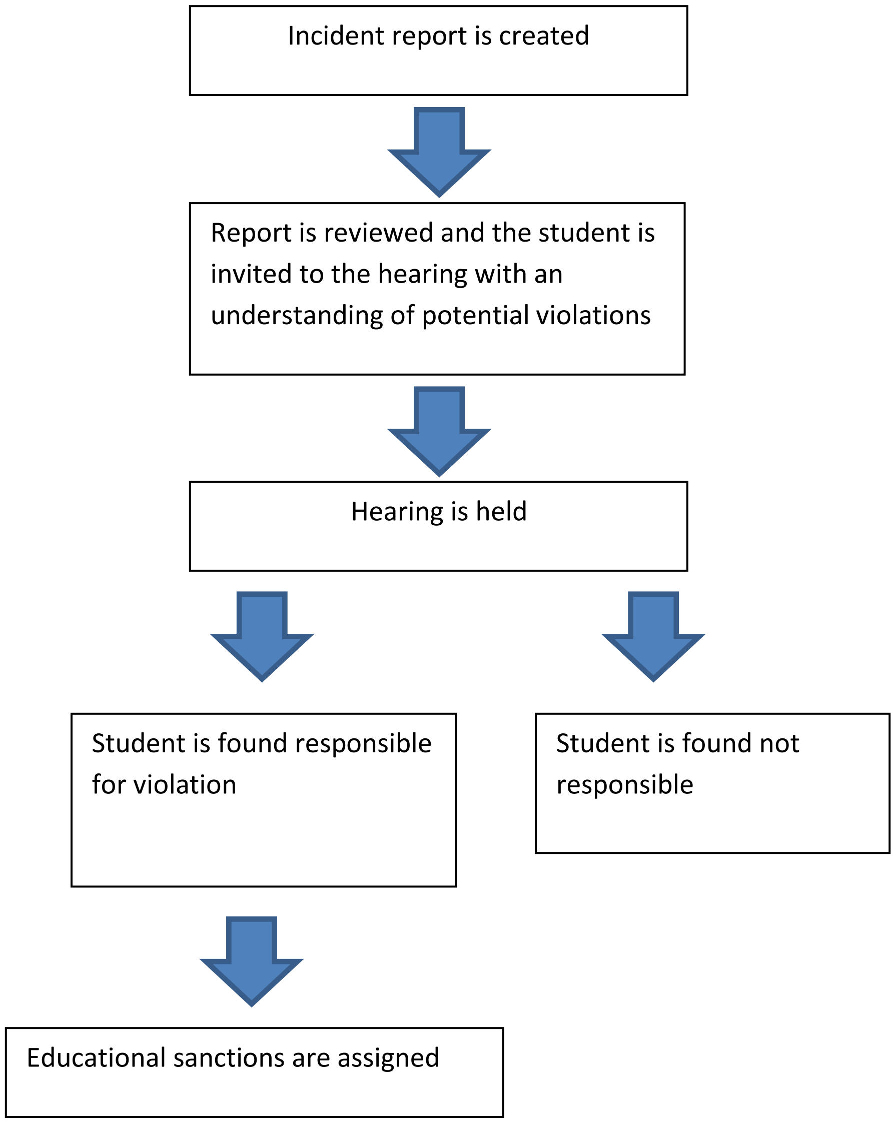
When a violation occurs, one of the first questions often asked is, "What will happen to those who violated the policy?" (Anderson et al., 2018). While conduct on a college campus is not intended to reflect the values of the criminal justice system, some of the philosophies that guide conduct processes overlap with those in the criminal justice realm, such as the hearing structure, explanation of student rights in the student code of conduct, and the use of statements from individuals involved in making the determination (Fischer & Maatman, 2008; Loschiavo & Waller, 2017). Hearing officers need to consider the goals of sanctioning, which include deterring future wrongdoing, either by the student or others, and providing students with tools for changing their behavior in the future (Anderson et al., 2018).

Conduct processes provide students the opportunity to reflect on their role in the community and how their actions impact those around them (Anderson et al., 2018; Woods, 2009). However, if punitive sanctions are employed, resentment or alienation may emerge, causing rebellion rather than reflection (Karp & Sacks, 2014; Stoner & Cerminara, 1990). Finally, systems which impose punitive sanctions may inspire resentment or alienation on the part of the offenders. Rather than allow students to reflect on their behaviors, it might inspire them to continue those behaviors as a way of rebellion (Zdziarski & Wood, 2008).

Educational sanctions also align with the educational mission of most colleges and universities, which is to prepare students to serve as good global citizens during and after their attendance. “Institutions of higher education across the globe are built on a foundation that includes a mission, vision, values, and goals.” (Anderson et al., 2018, p.195). Typically, behavior that violates a university conduct or residential code is inconsistent with institutional goals. It is possible the students with whom residence life staff meet do not know or realize this is the case. When residence life conduct officers meet with students and hold them accountable for their behavior, these staff members expose the student to a new path to discuss institutional and personal values, as well as ways to cease behavior not in alignment with institutional expectations. A sample conduct flow chart is below in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Sample Moral Code Student Conduct Process Flow Chart



Note: This figure illustrates a sample student conduct process flow chart from the creation of the incident report through to the assignment of educational sanctions.

There are many considerations that a hearing officer uses to determine the most appropriate sanction (Weaver, 2019; Zdziarski & Wood, 2008). Hearing officers consider sanctioning guides provided by their institution, and the student's previous conduct history.

These methods are used not only to ensure that the student is receiving a sanction consistent with the violation, but also to ensure consistency among the numerous hearing officers. Anderson, Kogan, and Liang (2018) stated that even in a situation in which the hearing officer is mandated to assign a particular sanction, there should be efforts to tailor the sanction to the needs of the student. The authors further explained that when it comes to sanctions, consistency may not be reflected by the same sanction being assigned to the same violation, but by a consistent approach in which students experience individual growth from the hearing.

Research on Educational Sanctions

Understanding the impact of educational sanctions is especially important (King, 2012; Howell, 2005). After each hearing, as a method for continuing the reflection that took place in the hearing, students are often assigned at least one, although typically several, educational sanctions to complete after their hearing (Howell, 2005; Karp & Sacks, 2014). These measures, whether they be community service projects, alcohol or drug education classes, or another type of knowledge-seeking activity, are designed to give students an opportunity to continue the learning process that began in the conduct hearing.

Asher (2008) studied the impact of sanctions on recidivism rates for alcohol-based policy violations. Specifically, she wanted to research the information learned through sanctions and its impact on future decision making. She conducted a quantitative study in which students completed surveys after finishing their assigned sanctions. The university offered options such as a referral to the counseling center on campus, and a program called PEAR, “Personal Education, Assistance and Referral”. This consisted of four group sessions of alcohol education and motivational intervention in the hopes of providing students with additional educational tools around issues relating to alcohol. Some 483 students who were found to have violated the alcohol policy were invited to participate in the survey. A total of 112 students responded. Asher (2008) found that, of the students who were solely assigned to the counseling center, 16.7% were found responsible for an additional alcohol violation that year. Students who participated in the PEAR program had a 0% recidivism rate. She also found that students who had both the PEAR program and counseling center referral reported the highest degree of new information learned.

Kompalla and McCarthy (2001) studied the impact of conduct sanctions on recidivism and retention. Students involved in this study participated in an active sanction, based upon the nature of the violation. Group One consisted of 15 people who attended an alcohol education course, Group Two included 34 people who participated in a community service project, Group Three consisted of five people assigned to write a reflection paper, and Group Four were 74 students who received a warning, suspension, or some other sanction that was not active. Kompalla and McCarthy (2001) found that those who wrote a reflective paper had no recidivism through additional violations, those who participated in the community service project had 15% recidivism, and those that participated in the alcohol course had a 33% recidivism rate. Overall, they found that 19% of offenders received an active sanction, and 19% of offenders received a passive sanction. The remaining students were not found to have reoffended after their hearing. The number remained the same. The authors came to two conclusions after this study: 1) sanctions do have an impact on future wrongdoing, and 2) whether the sanction is passive or active does not affect the outcome; however, the type of active sanction does have an impact on recidivism.

Contemporary Issues in Student Conduct

Recent Research

Two recent doctoral dissertations studied the topic of preparing hearing officers to take on their prospective roles. Mahnke (2016) researched the impact of integrating restorative justice practices into hearing officer training, and whether doing so would provide more satisfying outcomes for the students involved. A total of 12 participants joined the study. In another study, Crocker (2020) asked hearing officers to reflect on the employer-provided training that they received in relation to whether they were sufficiently prepared to assist students who had violated their alcohol policy.

In contrast to the aforementioned studies, I asked hearing officers about (1) their overall experience, (2) the tools and resources that they desired, and (3) their opinions on how the experience of conducting hearings could be improved. I attempted to fill the gap in literature by allowing hearing officers to express their thoughts and feelings on the preparation that they have received, and how this has played out in the practice of student conduct administration. I believe that we can best learn from those that are engaging in the practice of student conduct administration in order to better prepare future practitioners.

Restorative Justice in Student Conduct

The field of student conduct is ever growing and changing (Baxter Magolda, 2009; Fischer & Maatman, 2008). It is a function that needs to adapt and change to meet the needs of the student being served. One area where there has been significant research in the last few years is restorative justice (Karp, 2015; Zehr, 2015). Restorative justice is an approach to student conduct recognizing that students who have harmed a community, by violating behavioral expectations, for example, must play an integral role in deciding how to best address the harm they have caused to their community (Karp, 2015).

Karp (2015) clarified that restorative justice style hearings are not meant to take the place of traditional conduct models. Rather, Karp's belief is that restorative justice approaches should precede the traditional conduct hearing, in the hopes that it will not be necessary. If students understand their role in the community and seek to make amends for the damage that they have caused to the community, then the additional hearing and sanctions may not be required (Karp, 2015).

Karp and Frank (2016) used a case study from Dalhousie University in Nova Scotia, Canada to illustrate restorative justice practices in student conduct. In the fall of 2014, 13 male students enrolled in the School of Dentistry posted messages in a private Facebook chat that encouraged sexual violence. These messages ranged from asking students to select from female students to encouraging the use of chloroform to make women unconscious. The campus community was outraged, and campus protests began, as well as newspaper editorials advocating the expulsion of the men in the Facebook group (Karp & Frank, 2016).

As the comments were made in a private Facebook chat, despite their offensive nature, the university did not feel it appropriate to expel the students, but rather took the restorative route. In doing so, the students engaged in the four principles of restorative justice as described by Karp (2015). The inclusive decision-making came about from the offenders hearing from those students that were harmed and brainstorming ways to make restitution. The second, is active accountability, where they began to accept responsibility for their actions, and how they violated the trust of the community. Third is working to repair harm. In this case, the offending students, as well as the women in the School of Dentistry, put out a statement acknowledging that they were working together to not only repair the harm committed, but to also understand any contributing factors. Finally, the last principle is rebuilding trust. In this case, the efforts to engage the students in the process, and have them contribute at every step of the way, help them regain the trust of the community. By actively engaging in the restorative work, they are demonstrating their willingness to be a part of the community, and be productive members moving forward.

Restorative justice models take the student conduct system further away from the courtroom-modeled traditional hearing process and allow the community to take center stage (Karp, 2015; Zehr, 2015). Restorative justice allows the student accused of wrongdoing to be an active participant in the process (Karp, 2015; Zehr, 2015). This allows the student to share their feelings and suggestions for how they can contribute to a resolution as part of the process, rather than as a silent observer.

Student Conduct and Social Justice

Another current issue within student conduct is the concept of social justice within student conduct (Martin-Ferguson et al., 2018). “Social justice includes addressing the differences among us such as race, gender, and sexual orientation while also valuing cultural differences and learning how to communicate within and across these differences” according to Holmes, Edwards and DeBowes (2009, p. 52). Treating all students in a fair and just manner is essential in student affairs, and that comes into particular focus in an area like student conduct. When speaking to the challenges that housing professionals face, Martin-Ferguson, Lendorf and Balfour-Simpson (2009) stated that it can be a particular challenge when “responding to incidents that address human rights and equality, such as cases related to bias, hate crimes, freedom and speech, bullying, and other topics involving what is consider to be fair and just among individuals in a society" (p.144).

Holmes, Edwards and DeBowes (2009) shared that student conduct can appear to be adversarial, simply by the nature of the current conduct system. The authors believe that in a process in which a student's behavior is held to be against the values of the institution can create feelings of unfairness amongst students. Despite the efforts of many to adapt college policies to reflect values of diversity, there is still a failure to be inclusive of the culture and backgrounds of all students.

Even the most minor aspects of the student conduct process should be reviewed under a social justice lens (Martin-Ferguson et al., 2018). For example, the letter that students receive requiring them to attend a hearing should be written in blameless and neutral language. The authors believe that it is important that the letter not presume fault or offer judgement prior to the student being asked what occurred. Both the presumption of fault and preliminary judgement are aspects of oppression, and student conduct officers must take careful steps to establish processes that provide equity to all students.

Martin-Ferguson, Lendof, and Balfour-Simpson (2018) also noted the relationship that some members of the community have to campus police or public safety officers can be an issue of social justice. Police on a college campus are present to maintain authority and to assist with law enforcement. However, not all students may perceive them as a benefit to the community. The authors note concerns from students who come from communities with poor police relationships, as well as undocumented students, who may be concerned that police will arrest and deport them to their home countries.

Stallman (2015) conducted his doctoral research by engaging in a multi-level quantitative study on implicit bias of hearing officers on college campuses. Implicit bias refers to the stereotypes or assumptions we make in an unconscious manner about someone who belongs to a particular group. Since the 1960s, conduct systems on college campuses have reflected the American judicial system. While studies of implicit bias have been conducted within the judicial system, none have been conducted in college conduct systems (Stallman, 2015).

Stallman (2015) conducted his research at a conference of student conduct administrators. Over 1100 administrators attended, and 175 participated in this study. Stallman had two components to the test; in the first, participants were presented with student conduct-related case studies, but the race of the offending student was changed between the groups. The race of the student was not explicitly stated but was implied based upon the name assigned to the student within the case study.

The second part was the administration of the Implicit Association Test. This test had seven components. The first was sorting words associated with the case studies into one of two categories: Good or Bad. Second, they had to sort pictures of people into various races, assigning them into two categories: European or African American. The third step required participants to place words into four block categories such as European/Good, European/Bad, African American/Good, and African American/Bad. The fourth and fifth step simply offered the first and second components again but reversed the order so as to not appear familiar. The sixth component reversed the order for the third and fourth step, but again changed the order. The seventh step had a combination of all of the previous categories, again with the order confused.

Overall, the results showed that hearing officers were less likely to find the white student responsible for the violation, less likely to believe that he/she would violate policy again, and assigned lighter sanctions, than those in the exact same case, but under a name associated with a Black student. The finding of this research shows that social justice is an important factor in student conduct. Our implicit biases are a factor in our decision-making, and our process design and execution must confront these biases in order to ensure fairness to all students.

Training of Hearing Officers

One of the most underrepresented areas in student conduct research is related to how hearing officers should be trained. Cordner and Brooks (1987) discussed the recruitment, selection, and training of conduct board members. The authors recommended topics such as introductions to the group, reviewing the current conduct code, the violations, the recommended or mandated sanctions, and depending on the institutions, the actual process that they will go through in this role, relevant legal cases, and resources, as well as encouraging role-playing hearings.

Waryold (1998) also discussed training for hearing officers. Waryold agreed that observations, experiential activities, and role-playing hearings were the best ways to train hearing officers. Both articles stated that training should be continuous throughout the year and encourage those who lead the conduct processes to adapt training based upon new knowledge.

These two articles, and the suggestions that they offer, focus conduct officer training on the institution-specific information. For example, reviewing the conduct code, looking at the process and the sanctions offered, are all institution-specific elements of student conduct. Their training is focused on how to complete the steps in that particular process, but neither suggest ways to fully understand the meaning behind conduct, engage students, or develop sanctions that will help them to learn.

Summary

This chapter began with an introduction to the Human Resources approach, which focuses on employers valuing the experience and work of their staff, and allows them to be involved in decision-making, and specifically, the Strategic Training of Employees Model (STEM), which focuses on how proper training can build that investment in employees to the organization. I discussed how this model influenced the development of the research questions, as well as the history of the STEM model.

I then reviewed the history of student conduct, and its role on college campuses today. This provided a context to understand the process. I described the role of the hearing officer, as well as more about the overall conduct hearing process. This section concluded with a quick review of new areas of research within conduct, including the restorative justice model, which is an approach to student conduct resolution that many universities are adapting into their conduct systems, and integrating social justice into the conduct process. I finished this chapter with a brief review of the training that conduct officers receive.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to understand the lived experiences of hearing officers. While there are some competencies that have been established, the field of student conduct has not developed consistent training to address the needs of hearing officers (Lancaster & Waryold, 2008). I wanted to provide an opportunity for the hearing officers to offer feedback on the training and preparation that they have received to serve in this role. The specific research questions for this study are as follows:

RQ1. How are hearing officers trained for their roles?

RQ2. Do conduct officers feel that the practice of student conduct in their university is meeting the goals of developing the whole student including character, values, and life skills?

RQ3. What is the lived experience of the hearing officer?

RQ4. What institutional processes influence the hearing officers' experience?

This chapter describes the method used while conducting this research. Beginning with a review of phenomenological research, it then describes the participants in the study and the steps taken to recruit them, followed by an explanation of the research instruments, which includes the development of the questionnaire, and the individual interviews. This is followed by an explanation of the data collection process and analysis. Finally, this chapter ends with a discussion of the ethics involved in this research, the trustworthiness of the results, and limitations that exist within the research. Full description of the data from both questionnaires and interviews can be found in Chapter 4.

Overview and Rationale for Methods Selection

At the onset of this experience, I needed to decide whether qualitative or quantitative research was best suited to my dissertation. Quantitative research is best used when, "testing objective theories by examining the relationship among variables" (Cresswell, 2014, p. 4), as opposed to qualitative research which is best used when trying to understand the lived experiences of a group of individuals (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). I decided that qualitative research would be the best approach for my dissertation. According to Bloomberg and Volpe, "Importantly, qualitative research includes an understanding of context, circumstance, environment, and milieu" (p. 38). Conversely, quantitative research measures statistical or mathematical differences; however, I wanted to understand experiences (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Patton (2002) states that the decision as to which method to use is pragmatic.

> If you want to know how much people weigh, use a scale…If you want to know what their weight means to them, how it affects them, how they think about it, and what they do about it, you need to ask them questions to find out about their experience and hear their stories. (p. 13)

Quantitative research methods deal with hard facts that can be seen, collected, and measured. Qualitative research deals with feelings, thoughts, and reflections that can be collected and analyzed. With these stark differences in research method in mind, qualitative methods seemed to be the best approach for my research.

Phenomenological Research

Yin (2011) discussed multiple approaches in qualitative research. The case study approach was not selected because case studies allow a researcher an in-depth look at one particular experience, program, event or activity (Yin, 2011). A case study would have been appropriate if I had wanted to study how multiple people experience conduct at the same institution. This study was also not suited for narrative inquiry because Yin stated that narrative inquiry allows for the exploration of experiences through the stories that are told by people, and how history, society and culture influence this understanding. This may have been appropriate if I wanted to hear only the hearing officers' stories, and the meaning behind those stories. I wanted to hear about the lived experiences of hearing officers, and the essence of that experience, as opposed to how hearing officers would tell their stories. For this study, lived experiences would mean the experiences of an individual and the knowledge they gained from that experience. Yin (2011) also suggested that ethnographic studies are appropriate in cases where a researcher wants to understand people with a shared culture. As I studied subjects with a common work experience, an ethnographic study would not be appropriate. One other option for conducting this study would have been a grounded study. A grounded study occurs when a researcher conducts the interviews and then develops a hypothesis based upon the data collected. A grounded study would not have been appropriate to this study, as I knew I wanted to speak to hearing officers and learn about how their training prepared them to take on the role, and what their lived experiences are in this role (Yin, 2011). As I knew what I wanted to study, a grounded study would not have fit my research goals. Yin (2011) described phenomenological research as inquiry aimed at capturing the uniqueness of events. Phenomenological research works to put events into their appropriate context. Specifically, this type of investigation allows the experience to be understood by hearing about it from the participant's own words (Yin, 2011).

Participants

For this research, I utilized purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling allows the researcher to decide which cases to include in their research (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). This study seeks to understand the lived experiences of professionals from a large number of institutions. By setting criteria at the beginning for participants, I was able to remove those individuals whom I did not feel would be beneficial to this research. But once the participants had met those criteria, I included their experiences.

For this research, the inclusion criteria were that participants had to be full-time residence life staff members who serve as hearing officers. I also limited the participants to those who work in residential populations of under 5,000 students. Ultimately, I was able to recruit 34 participants for the questionnaire, and five volunteers for the individual interview.

Recruitment of Participants

To recruit participants, I posted a message that explained the study and included a link to my questionnaire in three different Facebook groups, as Facebook is the social media platform that I used most. I know that many student affairs professionals use this platform as well. As I was not collecting data that could be linked back to any institution, I did not need permission from any university. All three Facebooks groups contain student affairs professionals and offer opportunities for members to share ideas and ask for input from professionals at other institutions. These Facebook groups included the following: (1) the Student Affairs Professionals group, which had over 31,000 members, from all student affairs areas; (2) the North East Association of College and University Housing Officers (NEACUHO), which had 680 active members, and is focused on supporting housing professionals in the Northeastern United States and, (3) the Boston Area College Housing Association (BACHA), which had 562 members, and supports housing officers directly in the Boston area. I selected these groups because many residence life staff members who also have conduct responsibilities are represented within them.

I received responses from 34 individuals. In quantitative research, the size of a sample can be estimated based on the likelihood of finding statistically significant results. In qualitative research, which does not attempt to test hypotheses statistically, this criterion is irrelevant (Yin, 2011). A sample of 34 responses provided me with confidence that I had received adequate data to help answer my research questions. After conducting a brief review of the data that I collected, I found that in the close-ended questions, responses were spread among the various options, providing me confidence that I would gather data from respondents with different answers and experiences. Upon reviewing the open-response data, I found that, while some similar themes were represented, there was also a variety of responses that were not often repeated. Upon recognizing this variety in the data represented, I felt confident that I had enough data to analyze from the questionnaire.

Fusch and Ness (2015) state that data saturation, or the point where the researcher has collected enough data, can be hard to define. The different types of qualitative research may require a different standard. For example, the point of data saturation in an ethnography may differ from the point in a case study research design. Fusch and Ness (2015) affirmed that researchers need to distinguish between rich and thick data. They defined rich data as intricate, detailed and nuanced. Thick data they defined as a large amount of data. They stress that rich data relies on the depth and strength of the data to recognize the point of saturation. Upon recognition of the depth and quality of the data that I had collected on the questionnaire, I felt that the 34 responses I had received were adequate for my research.

I made the questionnaire available for two weeks between the end of July and early August 2017. To maximize responses, I made this decision because August becomes an intense month, with training and opening of the residence halls. I felt that after a two-week push for participation, very few people would have the time to participate in the questionnaire. In total, 48 people opened the questionnaire; however, 14 submitted partial or blank responses to most questions. A partial response was fewer than five questions answered. I removed incomplete questionnaires, leaving 34 for analysis. One of the questions asked if the participants would be willing to participate in a follow-up interview. Seven individuals volunteered to participate in the interview. I contacted all seven respondents through email addresses they provided and five replied to that email to schedule an interview.

Cresswell (1998) advises that phenomenological research involve at least five interviews. A goal of five participants was set, as that number was determined to provide enough variety of responses to complement the questionnaire data. Upon review of the five interviews conducted, the question of data saturation became relevant once again (Fusch & Ness, 2015). After reviewing the data collected, I determined that the interviews provided enough rich data for a deep analysis.

Instrumentation

For this study, I used two data collection methods. Multiple methods for gathering data are often used to develop a deeper understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Yin, 2011). Utilizing different data collection methods, if findings overlap, lends validity to your study and your findings (Creswell, 2008).

Questionnaire

Questionnaires are commonly used research tools to gather data from a large number of respondents not limited to a single geographic area (Rowley, 2014). A questionnaire is defined as a document where open and closed-ended questions are asked of a respondent who is expected to provide an answer (Rowley, 2014). In this study, I wanted to offer hearing officers all over the country the opportunity to answer questions about their experiences, with both closed-ended and open-ended questions. The questionnaire seemed to be a data collection method that suited my research well.

I developed questions that I hoped would capture the lived experience of the hearing officer. For many questions, I provided answers that they could select. I also provided an open response box on some questions in order to gather additional data. The questionnaire included a mixture of questions that asked participants to choose an answer from a list of options. For example, one question asked if the participant had ever received specific training on designing sanctions to meet the needs of the student; this question could only be answered "yes" or "no." Open-ended questions allowed participants to elaborate on their answers; for example, those who answered "yes" to the question about training were asked to describe what kind of training they received in greater detail. The questions provided a broad perspective on the opinions and experiences of the participants.

Cresswell (2008) identified three types of questions asked on questionnaires. The first type are background questions; in this study, participants were asked about the number of years of experience they had in the field, the size of the school where they are currently employed, the type of conduct cases they usually heard, and the type of institution where they currently are employed, i.e., public or private, four-year university or community college. These demographic questions were important to understand their background and education. Another set of questions asked additional details about the hearing officers' responsibilities, for example, the number of hours spent each week in conduct hearings and the types of cases that they heard.

The second type are attitudinal questions. "Researchers use attitudinal measures when they measure feelings toward educational topics." (Cresswell, 2008, p. 161). Three of the questions asked in this questionnaire are related to whether participants felt they were acting as educators, how they felt about approaching students in order to build a connection with them, and how they felt about the conduct process's impact on the students. In contrast to the more factual questions, these allowed the respondents to offer their opinions, observations, and attitudes. The attitudinal questions included several that were open-ended, such as whether the participant felt that the conduct process had any impact on learning outcomes or student development, and in what ways student affairs professionals can work to improve the student conduct process.

The third type are behavioral questions, which ask about their factual circumstances (Cresswell, 2008). In this questionnaire, participants were asked about their training, whether their campus participates in pro-active educational efforts, or whether any follow-up assessment takes place after the conduct hearing. Open-ended behavioral questions asked whether the participants do any follow-up assessment after the student completes the conduct process. A copy of the full questionnaire is in Appendix A.

Interviews

Interviews are among the most commonly used qualitative research methods, because they offer the researcher the opportunity to gather rich data from a single source (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Interviews are best used in order to "capture perceptions, attitudes, and emotions of the interview participant" (p. 193). While the questionnaire allowed me to gather data from a large set of individuals, the individual interviews allowed me the opportunity to go in depth with a few select individuals.

Yin (2011) stated that interviews are a structured interaction between a subject and interviewer. Yin said that there are two types of interviews: structured interviews, and qualitative interviews. In a structured interview, the researcher will use established questions to solicit information from the subjects. The interviewer must adopt the same body language and behavior for each interview subjects, so as to not influence the responses that they receive. The interviewer will often script almost every part of the interaction in a structured interview.

In a qualitative interview, there is generally much less structure (Yin, 2011). There is no complete list of questions that the interviewer may use. They may ask a follow-up question or clarifying question to an answer that the subject provides. The behavior of the interviewer can also differ between subjects in a qualitative interview. The qualitative interview follows a more conversational approach, so there may be a more individualized interaction between each subject and the interviewer.

Yin (2011) also stated that there is a difference between the types of questions asked during the interviews. He argued that questions will be more open-ended in approach, to truly allow the subject to be free to answer in the way that they see fit. A qualitative interviewer would not want to put any constraints on the subject. For this research, I used a combination of structured and qualitative interview approaches. While I did have a standard set of closed-ended questions that I used for each interview, I also employed open-ended questions for additional information gathering.

Data Collection

By combining questionnaires and interviews, I was able to utilize the strengths of each approach. Questionnaires have the advantage of allowing researchers to collect many responses efficiently, from across a large geographic area (Patton, 2002). The open-ended interviews, on the other hand, allow the participants to share more of their personal experience (Patton, 2002; Rowley, 2014).

Questionnaire Informed Consent

Before distributing the questionnaire, I presented it to the Lesley University Institutional Review Board, which accepted it for ethical compliance. Afterwards, I distributed the questionnaire through the selected Facebook groups. To participate, respondents clicked on the link which connected them to a brief informed consent document. This document stated that their participation was voluntary and that their participant information was not going to be stored and explained how to report any concerns or complaints related to the questionnaire. Clicking on the arrow to begin the questionnaire acted as the agreement to participate (see Appendix B).

The Questionnaire

The questionnaire link was posted in the three separate Facebook groups with the participant criteria included. Criteria included participants currently serving as a residence hall director with conduct responsibilities, at universities with less than 5,000 residential beds. After approximately three weeks the link was turned off, and the data analysis began.

This questionnaire included sixteen closed-ended questions, and nine open-ended questions. Some of the close-ended questions required a yes/no response; other questions directed the participant to select a single answer from several choices. The nine open-ended questions allowed participants to elaborate on their answers. For example, one closed-ended question asked participants to choose, from several options, the types of conduct cases they typically hear. A follow-up question allowed them to enter additional types of cases they hear on a regular basis.

Interview Informed Consent

Once participants agreed to participate in the interview, they received a copy of the informed consent document. The two in-person interviewees brought the signed copy to the interview. The three subjects interviewed over the phone emailed the signed and scanned informed consent document back to me before the interview began. In all five cases, whether in person or over the phone, I read the document to participants to allow for any questions to be answered. The informed consent document reiterated the parameters of the interview and reminded participants that none of the identifying information they provided including their names or their place of employment would appear in any written documentation (see Appendix D).

Interviews

The aim of interviewing is to gain a deeper understanding of another person's experience; Josselson (2013) suggested that the goal is to understand participants better than they understand themselves.

Some of the interview questions were open-ended; they were designed to allow participants to elaborate on their answers to the questionnaire. Some of the questions addressed how the hearing officers thought the conduct process could be improved; these challenged them to assess current limitations and opportunities for improving the students' experience. Other questions asked about how the culture of their campus may have affected their student conduct process, what they feel students take away from the process, and how they balance their responsibilities as educators with a fair and quick process.

The interviews were all conducted within one week of closing the questionnaire. I used a digital voice recorder to make a recording of each interview, with the participant's consent. The recorder allowed me to pay better attention, and to stay in the moment with the participant without being distracted by taking notes. Also, recording the interviews ensured that I was able to keep an accurate record of the interviews and hold myself accountable as a researcher. I conducted the other three interviews over speaker phone, so that the recorder could preserve these conversations as well. All five interviews took between 20 and 25 minutes to complete.

As a student affairs professional, who has served as a hearing officer for several years, I have my own opinions on the hearing process. By listening to the recordings, I was better able to ensure that I did not unintentionally reveal any of my personal biases or ask questions in a way that would influence the participant. Cook (2016) stated that recording an interview allows for the interviewer to revisit the recording in order to listen for pieces of information he/she may have missed when first reviewing the recording. Recording the interviews allowed me the opportunity to fully engage with the subject as they were answering the questions that I posed. Recordings are also helpful when transcribing interviews, to ensure that nothing was missed. A full list of the interview questions can be found in Appendix C.

Data Analysis

Organizing the Questionnaire Data

Once the questionnaire data was collected, I began the process of analysis. I reviewed the questionnaire results and calculated the number of responses for each question that required a choice. I reviewed the results of each closed-ended question and highlighted common themes. The open-ended response questions in which the individual had the opportunity to expand upon their answer were also color coded to detect common themes to align with appropriate research questions. Words were often helpful indicators in the coding process. For example, words such as “training” or “learning” were associated with research question One, which asked how hearing officers are trained for this role. On the other hand, words like “history” or “tradition” were associated with research question Four, which asked how specific institutional processes may have impacted their experience. Once themes were established, I used different colored highlighters and markers to color code the key words that helped establish the common themes. All of the data fell into a common theme, and no process for eliminating data was used.

Organizing the Interview Data

I transcribed all the interviews word-for-word within one week of the interview. I listened to each interview three times to ensure accuracy, paying careful attention to any hesitations that indicated interviewees were unsure of their answers.

I began by organizing the interview transcripts, in terms of my four original research questions. I color coded responses that matched each research question; I then organized the similarly coded passages into themes. For example, I first compiled all responses related to research question One, which related to the type of training participants received. Second, I looked for information related to question Two, which addressed the question about whether conduct officers feel that they are meeting the goals of developing the whole student. Next, I organized the data related to research question Three, about the lived experience of the hearing officer. I grouped whatever comments participants made related to building relationships with students, gaining trust, and their feelings toward this role. For the fourth research question, I looked for descriptions of different institutional processes that may influence the experience of the hearing officer. Finally, I reviewed the data see if any additional themes came up that I had not anticipated with my original research questions.

By color coding responses, I was able to identify common themes that arose from both the interviews, and the questionnaires. For example, both questionnaire and interview responses discussed how the hearing officers wanted to build a relationship with the student. This approach helped to shed some light on two of my research questions: (1) What institutional processes influence the hearing officers' experience? (2) Do conduct officers feel that the practice of student conduct in their university is meeting the goals of developing the whole student including character, values, and life skills?

Ethical Considerations

In any research, ethics must be considered (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Ethics of research can include protecting the privacy of the participants, maintaining their anonymity in any written documentation, or any information that may be connected back to them. Researchers must also consider the trustworthiness of their data, and how they can prove to the reader that their analysis and description accurately portray the experiences of the subjects (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

Once my proposal was accepted by my committee, I submitted the plan to execute my research, along with both the questionnaire and individual interview questions to the Lesley University Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB reviewed my proposal and approved my research to move forward, which offered assurance that I had taken appropriate steps to protect in the participants in my study.

The first consideration was to ensure privacy of the individuals. Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) defined privacy as controlling the access other people may have to research participants' information. Protecting the anonymity of the individual participants is an important ethical consideration. For those filling out the questionnaire, participants were not required to include their name nor their institution. For those participating in the individual interviews, respondents were each provided a pseudonym. The institution at which they worked was not recorded on any formal documents. These measures ensured that no information could be linked to any particular individual or institution.

Confidentiality concerns what researchers will do with all information they obtain. This is another important step in conducting research (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). All information was kept within my control, on a flash drive, and ultimately a separate hard drive. No other individual had access to any information containing the data that I collected for the study. Second, all data was stored on a password-protected hard drive and to be destroyed after five years. This ensures that the data will not be kept indefinitely.

The decision to participate in the questionnaire and interviews was entirely up to the individual. Prior to participation in the questionnaire and interviews, each participant completed an informed consent document. The informed consent document outlined ethical considerations, reassured confidentiality, and reiterated that the individual participants could withdraw from participating at any time. The informed consent document also provided contact information for my senior advisor, should participants feel the need to report any ethical violation.

Trustworthiness

Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) described trustworthiness as how well the researcher accurately displayed what the participants thought. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested four criteria for establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research. The first criterion is credibility. defined as whether the perceptions of the study's participants align with how the researcher has written about their experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, I used thick description to enhance trustworthiness. Patton (2002) defined thick description as going beyond a mere recording of fact and basic description: "It presents detail, context, emotion, and the webs of social relationship that join persons to one another" (p. 503). Thick description requires the researcher not only to present the data that they find, but to interpret it as well (Patton, 2002).

I also engaged in triangulation of data by utilizing two different data collection methods. Triangulation is defined as using multiple data collection methods to collect information on the same topic (Yin, 2011). Triangulation helps not only to validate data by finding it through more than one research method, but also in providing different perspectives, and ensuring a full scope to the phenomena that is being studied.

The second criterion set by Lincoln and Guba (1985), dependability, is defined as the stability of the data. Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) spoke to the issue of dependability as making sure that the research process is clearly “documented, logical, and traceable” (p. 204). Lincoln and Guba argued that triangulation, the use of different data collection methods, would go a long way toward ensuring the dependability of the research. Similarly, Creswell (2013) said that using two methods of data collection allows researchers to corroborate information. In this study I used both a questionnaire and an interview; their convergence lends credibility to the conclusions. In addition, during the writing process, I kept a research diary where I recorded reflections on each step in the process. Keeping this diary helped to organize my thoughts and keep my research questions the central focus of my work.

The third criterion is the confirmability of the data, which includes how aware the researcher is of potential biases, and the steps the researcher takes to mitigate those biases (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Confirmability of the data assures that the data is a result of research, as opposed to being influenced by the bias and subjectivity of the researcher. In order to strengthen confirmability, I kept an audit trail using a research diary to add my reflections and thoughts as I conducted my researcher. This ensured that I could demonstrate how my data could be traced back to its source, to ensure it is consistent and from more than one source and include self-reflection to question and explore appropriate responses.

The final criterion is transferability, which is defined by the degree to which findings can be generalized to other settings. Lincoln and Guba (1985) argued that in qualitative research, investigators must recognize that even if they succeed telling the story of the set of participants they studied, they may not be telling a universal story. In order to achieve transferability, I used a purposeful sampling strategy, as well as thick description and detailed information on my research process. This practice will ensure that future researchers could apply my research methods.

Researcher Bias

Researcher bias is demonstrated when the researcher influences the results by inserting their own opinion (Yin, 2011). Yin stated, “To avoid this kind of bias requires a strong ethical standard. You need to start your research by setting clear rules to define the circumstances under which any data are later to be excluded” (p. 39). Patton (2002) said that, “The principle is to report any personal or professional information that may have affected data collection, analysis, and interpretation” (p. 566). As a researcher, it is important that you are aware of any potential biases that may have impacted your work, and work to combat these influences. It is also important that you are honest about potential experiences or factors that may influence your research.

It was important to be aware of my potential bias, as I wanted to hear answers that supported my concerns related to hearing officer training. I mitigated this bias by not asking leading questions, asking appropriate probing questions, and by avoiding body language that may have inadvertently influenced a participant’s responses. Finally, because of my bias, I developed questions from a viewpoint that reflected my own experience; however, I made every attempt to set aside my own experience and let the hearing officers speak for themselves.

Limitations

Limitations are defined as any external conditions that may impact the outcome of the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). It is important to acknowledge several possible limitations of this study; these may have affected both the questionnaire and the interviews.

The questionnaire used in this research used both closed-ended and open-ended questions. The close-ended questions lock participants into selecting from a predetermined list of response options, which limits the depth of responses (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Patton, 2002). Had I given participants an open-response option on every question, this may have allowed for a wider variety of responses that did not provide data that I needed to answer my research questions.

I also provided open-ended questions on some topics that allowed the subject to provide a response that did not come from a pre-selected list. By doing so, this offered subjects the chance to provide an answer from their own experience and reduced potential bias. The open-ended questions will hopefully allow for the respondents to provide more detailed information. I relied on my own experience to develop those response options; it is possible that other options might have better captured my participants' experience. For example, my questionnaire offered participants only three options to describe how they assigned sanctions: 1) assign from mandated sanctions, 2) choose from preassigned list, or 3) create your own. These were the options I have seen most in my professional experience; however, an institution could provide other options to assign sanctions. I should note that while I did rely on my own experience, I also read extensively about common practices in the student conduct field; this gives me some confidence that the questions and response options on the questionnaire reflect more than my individual experience.

I offered a close-ended response when I wanted to limit the options, and an open response question when I wanted there to be more elaboration on an answer. A majority of the questions did lock respondents into choosing from an established list of potential answers. I developed these answers based upon my own experiences and knowledge. However, when I wanted a more detailed answer, or wanted to allow the respondent to elaborate, I provided an open response question that allowed them to provide more detailed information. The decisions I made about which format each question would take, could have limited options I had not considered when developing the questionnaire.

Delimitations

There are several delimitations of this study that could have impacted the overall data collected. Delimitations are defined as, “the initial choices made about the broader, overall design of your study” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019, p. 207). For this research, I delimited respondents to those who were serving as full-time residence hall directors but assumed the role of hearing officer as part of their job responsibilities. I also delimited the study to participants who worked at universities that have fewer than 5,000 residential students, because larger universities often have full-time conduct officers. I wanted to speak to people for whom conduct is part of their job, but not their entire job. I also chose to collect data from professionals across the country. This enabled me to obtain responses from professionals at a wide range of institutions.

Summary

This chapter focused on the research method used in this study. It began with an overview of qualitative research and phenomenology as a research approach. I then described the participants and how they were recruited. I discussed the questionnaire design and implementation, as well as a discussion on the individual interview questions. I then discussed the data collection methods and how the data was analyzed. I concluded with ethical considerations and limitations and delimitations of the study. Chapter 4 discusses the findings of the study.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the lived experiences of hearing officers. There is a distinct lack of research on the experiences of these professionals, especially in regard to the training that they receive. This chapter reviewed the key findings from the questionnaire and interview results. They are based upon the research questions established at the onset of this research, which are:

RQ1. How are hearing officers trained for their roles?

RQ2. Do hearing officers feel that the practice of student conduct at their university is meeting the goals of developing the whole student including character, values, and life skills?

RQ3. What is the lived experience of the hearing officer?

RQ4. What institutional processes influence the hearing officers' experience?

Questionnaire Findings

The questionnaire findings are presented according to each research question. Rowley (2014) argued that questionnaires are best used when gathering information from a large group of people who are spread across a large geographic area. Questionnaires offer flexibility to a researcher, as the questions asked can vary from factual to seeking their opinion (Rowley, 2014). Thirty-four residence hall directors, who serve as hearing officers, responded to the questionnaire.

RQ1 How are hearing officers trained for their roles?

Finding 1: A Majority of the Respondents Believed They Had Not Received Specific Training on Learning or Educational Theory.

As I began this research, I wanted to know more about the training that the hearing officers received. The first question asked whether the participant had received any specific training on moral development and educational theory, educational or transformative education theory as part of their role as a conduct hearing officer.

Twenty-four participants (71%) responded they had not received any specific training on learning or educational theory. Student conduct is a process focused on educating students. The opportunity exists for students to reflect on their experiences and find some meaning from their behavior. The hope is that, through reflection, they grow and develop from this experience (Howell, 2005; Karp & Sacks, 2014). While this data aligns with my experience, and confirms my understanding of current conduct training, I had strongly suspected that training hearing officers in learning theory would be more prevalent. I now think that hearing officers should have been provided with a deeper knowledge of educational theory, such as moral, or transformative education. As student conduct attempts to help students attain some moral growth and change their behaviors, these are theories that could be expected within conduct training.

When asked to elaborate on the type of types of training received, one person disclosed, “We used BASICS, which is an alcohol education course, and I utilize several of the student counseling techniques that I learned from my graduate course work.” Another respondent answered, “I was trained on and utilized motivational interviewing and person-centered therapy/counseling techniques in my conduct hearings.”

These answers highlight a major part of the problem, which is that training is inconsistent among hearing officers. The respondents here mentioned BASICS training, a program not every institution uses; lessons learned at conferences, which can be expensive and not every staff member can attend; and counseling techniques, not training that every hearing officer will possess. The question also did not give a definition of training, so respondents may have interpreted that term differently. Since there are no specific educational paths to become a hearing officer, for example, some will only have an undergraduate degree from any number of disciplines, some may have a master's concentrating on higher education, and some may have a master's that comes from a different discipline. This illustrates a gap in levels of education for hearing officers that could affect the experience. I believe this highlights the need for specific training and guidance.

I was also surprised that nobody spoke to any specific learning theories, such as moral development or transformative learning. As conduct administration is meant to have students reflect on their behavior, and hopefully make a change, I was stunned to see that this information was not mentioned by hearing officers.

Finding 2: The Majority of Participants Reported that They Had Received Training on Both the Administrative Process, and Conduct Philosophy.

From my experience, most of the training that I have received focused on the administrative process, such as the forms to fill out and the rights that each student has within that particular conduct process. I wanted to ask more about the topics covered in their training experiences. The next question asked what kind of training respondents received on the student conduct process at their current institution. The questionnaire provided participants with three options: training on the administrative process, training on conduct philosophy at their current institution, or both. Out of the 34 responses, 26 (76%) stated that they received training on both, seven (21%) listed only the administrative process, and only one (3%), stated the conduct philosophy was the primary focus.

I was not surprised that 97% of respondents learned about the administrative process. One respondent noted that his training focused on the educational philosophy surrounding student conduct. While more than three-quarters of respondents recounted that they received training on both, there was not a follow-up question asking them to elaborate on how this training manifested itself. I did not think to ask them to elaborate on the training itself. However, the clear majority of responses indicating that their training contained both the conduct philosophy and their institution administrative process conflicts with the first finding of this study, which shows that learning theory is not being taught as part of the preparation. It appears that they are being educated on the philosophy, which means that they are taught that conduct is meant to be an educational experience; however, no specific learning theories or models are established.

Finding 3: A Majority of Respondents Indicated They Had Not Received Training on How to Design Educational Sanctions.

The next question asked the respondents whether they had received training on creating specific sanctions. Eighteen respondents (53%) noted they had not received any special training. The remaining 16 (47%) shared they had received specific training.

This question was significant because educational sanctions are additional educational tools that hearing officers assign students. When students leave a hearing, it is important that they continue to reflect to make some meaning out of their experience. I feel that there needs to be better training on sanctions, to provide hearing officers additional educational tools with which they can design the sanctions they assign to the students. Without training on sanctions, students could be receiving sanctions that keep them busy, but do not educate; this goes against the modern perception of student conduct administration, which is to provide a learning opportunity.

This finding caused me to question the purpose behind the way that sanctions are assigned. Many institutions require hearing officers to select sanctions from a pre-approved list. But doing so can limit the degree to which the hearing officer can personalize the sanction to the individual student. If the expectation is that the hearing officer can determine the responsibility of the student, then he/she should be able to develop and assign individualized sanctions. This finding calls for more direct training on creating educational experiences and opportunities within the conduct process.

The following question asked those who answered that they had received training on designing educational sanctions to elaborate on the type of training. To this question, 15 respondents provided additional information; five out of those 15 provided multiple answers, leading to a total of 20 total responses being received. One respondent, who noted that he/she has received training, elaborated by stating, “We were provided a list of sanctions and spoke about how these different sanctions are impactful to students depending on their scenario.” Another wrote, “I received training regarding developing creative sanctions, and how you measure the impact of the sanctions on the student.” A third individual responded, “As a brand new professional, my supervisor and I have [had] several conversations about how to tailor sanctions that match the student need, as well as the violation.” This response shows that some institutions are providing lists of possible sanctions and are educating their staff on which sanction would be most beneficial to the student.

Some hearing officers stated that they had been trained by an alcohol and drug educator who is employed by their campus, ten cited training through professional organizations, and one person responded they participated in a webinar that assisted them. One answered that a supervisor helped, and two respondents attended conferences where the topic of specific sanctions was brought up. Some responses talked about being provided a list of available sanctions but being able to tailor the assigned sanction to the needs of the individual student. A few respondents mentioned professional conferences, and how hearing from other professionals who have dealt with similar sanctions was helpful in designing appropriate sanctions. Eleven respondents specified that in-house training conducted by their institutions helped them measure the impact of certain sanctions, and two talked about being shown restorative justice efforts. I was not surprised to see that those who answered yes provided examples of anecdotal training. One person said that their supervisor talked to them about designing training, and another divulged that they were shown how to measure the impact on the student.

The assigning of educational sanctions is an important part of the student conduct process. Educational sanctions are the activities that students will engage in after the hearing has concluded. Therefore, it is important that the sanctions be properly associated with the violation of the student conduct code. In my experience, I have worked at institutions that asked us to choose from a list of pre-approved sanctions. This finding has caused me to question whether hearing officers are properly prepared in the design and assignment of sanctions. Fewer than half of the respondents reported receiving the training, and of those that did, many provided more anecdotal or passive training. I believe this finding has shed some light on an important lack of proper training for hearing officers.

RQ2. Do Hearing Officers Feel that the Practice of Student Conduct at their University is Meeting the Goals of Developing the Whole Student Including, Character, Values and Life Skills?

Finding 4: The Majority of Hearing Officers Shared that They Want to Know More About Their Students.

I wanted to know more about how hearing officers were meeting the goals of student conduct, which were to provide an educational, developmental, experience for the student. One question on the questionnaire required hearing officers to share how they developed a trusting relationship with students. Out of the 34 responses received, 23 participants (67%) responded that it was important to build rapport with students by asking them about themselves and classes and talking about the importance of getting involved on campuses. One person divulged, “I need to demonstrate that I am genuine. That I am interested in them as a person, and how they are doing before getting into the details of the case.” Another is quoted, “I spend the first 10-15 minutes of each conduct meeting getting to know the student, their major, interests, involvement on campus, etc.” Another asserted, “I begin every meeting by getting to know the student as a person and ask them how their experience at the university has been thus far.” These three quotes demonstrate a commitment to knowing the student and demonstrating to the student that the hearing officer is there to support them. Three (9%) wrote that they stress that they are not judging the students, but that the conduct hearing process was meant to be beneficial to them. One replied, “I am very direct and brutally honest. I tell them I am not here to judge them, but to judge the action.” Five (15%) recounted that they engaged the student in conversations about their goals. Three (9%) explained the process and purpose of the student conduct hearing. One respondent said, “I start by explaining the intentionality behind how I frame the conduct meetings, show from the start I care about them as a person.”

What I found most interesting with this finding is that despite their answer, they all spoke to the same goal: They want to demonstrate to the student that they care about their success.

The approaches may be different, but the answers here all demonstrate a commitment to student success. In my experience, it was important that I engaged the students in a conversation to get to know them and present myself as an advocate for their success. Even in situations where there was disagreement in the conduct hearing, those students would often seek me out for advice or guidance with other issues that they may be facing. This experience demonstrates how important it is to build rapport with a student, even in a situation the student may perceive to be adversarial.

Finding 5: A Majority of Hearing Officers Believe that Modification in Sanctions Would Improve Conduct Hearing Process.

The questionnaire asked how hearing officers felt the hearing process could be improved. This question received a total of 28 responses. Six respondents did not provide an answer. The responses were broken into four themes: additional staff, paperwork, restorative justice, and sanctions.

Thirteen respondents (46%) mentioned sanctions as an opportunity for improving conduct. People wanted more training, better options, and the ability to tailor their sanctions to the needs of the student. One person uttered a desire for better training on sanctions by saying, "Develop more structure to sanctions (there are only those outlined for alcohol/drug policy violations) that helps staff have an idea as to how to associate a learning component rather than [being] punitive. Also, setting clear learning outcomes to hearings/sanctions." Three respondents stated that they felt that they should develop sanctions around a specific learning component. For example, setting learning outcomes with each sanction would be more beneficial to students learning something from their experience.

Two respondents noted that some sanctions should be more punitive as opposed to educational. One person opined, "It would be valuable to assess punitive sanctions to examine their effectiveness." These two respondents believed that some students needed to learn the lesson the hard way, as opposed to being offered a supportive, educational experience. On the other hand, several respondents wanted flexibility for students who make a poor choice for the first time. A respondent mentioned that there should be, "Room for leniency for students who are making a minor mistake for the first time. For example, minors being in a room with alcohol present automatically puts the student on six-month probation and required to complete an e-checkup even if they do not drink."

Eight also argued that the hearing officer should have more freedom around sanctions, stating that alcohol and drug violations typically have prescribed sanctions. Respondents argued that certain sanctions do not always apply to the specific student in question, and that conduct officers ought to have more leeway in determining the sanctions.

Two respondents indicated an interest in removing fines, which they feel harm students that come from a lower socio-economic background. One shared, "We need to stop assuming students can afford fines. Fines are inappropriate in higher education." Another respondent disagreed and stated that punitive sanctions should play a larger role in the conduct process. These participants expressed that the financial impact of a fine sometimes served as a stronger message to students than any paper-writing or reflection-based assignment.

Three respondents felt that students need to be a bigger part of the process. One of them said, "Students do not understand it is meant to be 'educated' in the broadest sense of the word, and this can lead to students not fully embracing the opportunity a conduct hearing presents them". These respondents suggested presenting the philosophy of the college regarding appropriate conduct to the student as a part of the process.

More creative sanctioning is a recurring theme among the responses in this question. The hearing officers want more guidelines and suggestions of how to create more impactful sanctions for students, especially those who have violated policy multiple times. The respondents state that these repeat offenders can be the hardest students to reach.

Three people (11%) responded that the reducing the paperwork would improve conduct. The respondents argued that the need for extensive paperwork ruins the flow of the conversation with the student. One respondent recounted, “At my current institution it is too paperwork/ signature focused rather than actually having a conversation with the student.”

Three respondents (11%) indicated an interest in using restorative justice practices. This process involves a student giving back to the community that they have harmed. Respondents indicated that they thought this idea would help students recognize the ripple effect that their behavior may be causing and might lead to a more satisfactory result all around. One respondent revealed, “I think that I could use more training on restorative justice when it comes to sanctions and could also do with some suggestions on what creative sanctions are being used at other small, rural institutions.” This quote speaks to the desire for a different kind of approach, where the student can make an effort to repair the damage done to the community.

Two individuals (7%) suggested that increasing staff would improve conducting hearings. Respondents noted that they have such an extensive caseload that only full-time, dedicated staff would be able to dedicate the right amount of time to this process. One person expressed, “At my institution I would love more hearing officers so folks can dedicate more time to each individual student rather than the pressure to rush through due to very high caseloads.” This speaks to the desire of student conduct officers to meet the needs of their students, while still managing many day-to-day tasks.

The variety of responses to this question shows that there is not one answer. There are many different approaches and thoughts as to how hearing officers can improve the conduct process. I infer from the variety of responses that conduct officers want to help their students grow and are constantly thinking of opportunities as to how they can do so.

The majority answer about how to improve student conduct was to give hearing officers more direct training on designing sanctions. This finding reinforces the fact that there is a deep need for evidence-based efficacy in student conduct, and meaningful sanctioning is an essential element of student conduct. The second highest number of responses affirmed the idea of allowing hearing officers more freedom. This finding demonstrates that hearing officers want to improve their skills. Hearing officers want training to provide them with the tools that will help them help their students. This finding makes me feel concerned for our current hearing officers, who may feel restricted in their ability to help the student in front of them. Whether this restriction comes from a limited knowledge of developing educational experiences, or from a restriction by an administrative hurdle, our hearing officers do not feel that they have the freedom or the knowledge to properly address the needs of their students.

I am concerned about the morale of hearing officers who feel that they do not have full control over their hearings. This could lead to job dissatisfaction; they may find that they are not putting in their full effort, since the process does not allow them to use their own judgement. By empowering our hearing officers, we are engaging them in the process, and allowing them to use their full range to skills to help the students going through conduct interventions. I can speak from personal experience that it is hard to fully invest in a process that you are expected to carry out but have no voice in how the process can be completed. It can have an impact on the morale of staff who do not believe that their voice is valued.

RQ 3. What is the Lived Experience of the Hearing Officer?

Finding 6: A Majority of Hearing Officers Reported that They Heard Drug and Alcohol Violations.

Wanting to get a better understanding of the lived experiences of hearing officers, I asked questions related to the types of cases that they hear and the number of hours they spent on conduct. The next question asked respondents about the types of cases the respondents usually hear. Thirteen (38%) reported they heard alcohol and drug policy violations. Nine respondents (26%) stated they heard alcohol policy violations, drug policy, and other campus policy violations, and three heard other campus policy violations. Four (12%) answered they only heard alcohol policy violations. Three respondents (9%) noted hearing other campus policy violations. Two (6%) pronounced that they heard alcohol policy violations, as well as other campus policy violations. One (3%) individual shared he/she only heard academic policy violations. One (3%) heard both academic policy violations and other campus policy violations. One (3%) person responded that it was alcohol, drug, academic, and other campus policy violations.

The responses to this question met my expectations. This question helped to demonstrate the variety of systems that hearing officers work under at various institutions. Despite their having the same job title, or role, the expectations at the individual university may vary.

Finding 7: In Addition to Drug and Alcohol Cases, Hearing Officers Hear Other Cases that Range from Noise Violations to Sexual Misconduct Violations

A follow-up question asked the respondents to offer examples of other types of cases they hear. Twenty-nine responders provided responses which indicated other types of cases they hear. Ten answered hearing noise policy violations. Six shared guest policy violations. Two heard violence concerns. Four heard residence hall damage cases. Two respondents voiced hearing cases involving failure to cooperate with university officials, two heard cases related to mental health concerns and two heard cases of Title IX violations, which would cover sexual harassment or violence cases. Finally, one person revealed hearing cases involving possession of a fake ID.

A majority of these findings did not surprise me. Noise policy, guest policy, and hall damage cases are extremely common in residence hall management. I was surprised that someone at the residence hall director level would hear a sexual misconduct case, often routed to the Title IX office as these cases are usually handled at a high level, with specially trained staff members.

Finding 8: A Majority of Respondents Reported that They Spent Between One to Three Hours on Conduct Weekly.

The following question asked respondents about the number of hours each week that they spend hearing student conduct cases. Fourteen respondents (41%) indicated that they spent one to three hours per week on conduct cases. Eleven (32%) respondents stated that they spent three to six hours a week. Five (15%) respondents said that they spent six to ten hours a week, with the remaining four (12%) indicating they spent over ten hours a week on conduct.

This is another question where the answer demonstrates the different expectations at different institutions. While a majority of responses indicated that one to three hours per week was common, some answered that over ten hours a week on conduct was normal. This is a wide range of responses from staff members with many responsibilities.

Finding 9: A Majority of respondents Reported that Engaging Students in Open and Direct Conversations Was the Best Way to Connect with Students.

Another question asked the hearing officers what they felt was the most impactful way to connect with college students, to review their behavior. Out of the 34 responses, eight (26%)

responded by saying that the conduct process is fine the way it is. One person said, “They respect admins who are honest and direct that talk to them not at them. They already feel that you are the "administration," us versus them mentality. When you can get them to understand that you care about them and are listening to them, the conversation goes into a much more sincere direction.” The overall comments revealed that engaging students in honest, and direct conversations, challenging them to reflect on their behavior, in the hope of producing a positive outcome, is the best way for hearing officers to connect with students today.

Six (18%) hearing officers recounted that they believed that the best way is focusing on how students’ behavior today can impact their future. One person stated, “I think it would be working individually with that student to realize how their choices can affect them in the future.” Two (6%) responded that they want to focus on how their behavior can impact their future relationships. Another two (6%) expressed that contacting students through social media was the best way to reach them, with positive messages of educating students on campus policies. Two (6%) others believe that utilizing restorative justice practices is the best way to reach students, while another two (6%) hold that proactive education, where you educate on policies before they are broken, is the best way to reach students.

The two majority responses to this question show that hearing officers need to take a genuine interest in their students and demonstrate that they are working for their well-being. Being honest and direct with feedback and allowing the student to reflect on their own behavior without judgement, are some of the best ways to connect with students through conduct. This finding concurs with my experience where being genuine and open with students, treating students as adults, and having honest and direct conversations is the best way to make a connection with them.

RQ 4. What Institutional Processes influence the Hearing Officer's Experience?

Finding 10: A Majority of Respondents Assign Sanctions from a Mandated List

The final research question focused on the institutional practices that may influence hearing officers' experience. Respondents were asked how sanctions were assigned to students. They were given choices: whether they assigned mandated sanctions, chose from an approved list, or have the freedom to assign sanctions they feel are appropriate. When selecting sanctions, 17 (50%) choose from a list of sanctions, nine (26%) assigned mandated sanctions, and eight (24%) have the freedom to develop their own.

The findings to this question demonstrate that sanctioning is one area where institutions provide pre-approved measures and limit hearing officers' ability to serve their student. The findings suggest that hearing officers want the ability to tailor the experience to the individual student but feel that they are not always given the opportunity to do so. Sanctions are one of the best ways of doing so, but not enough flexibility is being given to the hearing officers.

I have worked at institutions that provided a list of sanctions to choose from, and another that provided mandated sanctions. It was my experience that hearings where I assigned mandated sanctions based upon the violation, regardless of the student's circumstances, were less effective than when I was able to tailor the sanction to the student. Even when I had a list of sanctions to choose from when assigning, I enjoyed having the freedom to make necessary changes that would best fit the student.

Finding 11: A Majority of Universities are Engaging in Proactive Educational Efforts

The subjects were then asked if their institution provided proactive educational opportunities to educate students on campus policies, in an effort to stop policy violations before they occur. Nineteen (56%) replied yes, and 15 (44%) responded no. I was pleased to see that over half of the responding individuals worked at institutions where proactive education efforts were in place. I strongly believe in proactive education as a way to mitigate future conduct, and I would encourage all institutions to engage in these efforts in the hopes of building stronger communities and reducing conduct caseloads.

I have worked at institutions that engaged in proactive educational efforts and those that did not. I have found that institutions engaging in proactive education, while it did not necessarily stop the behavior, lead to greater conversations during the hearings. Students were often aware of policies, even if they had chosen to ignore them. This allowed me as a hearing officer to talk about their awareness of the policy, and why the policy existed. I found these conversations to be more fulfilling than those where I needed to begin the education on the policy.

Finding 12: A Majority of Hearing Officers Feel that They Are Educators.

Considering the significant administrative tasks involved, I wanted to learn if the respondents felt like educators within their role as a conduct hearing officer. Twenty-nine (85%) responded yes, and five (15%) answered no. I then wanted to know if institutions established learning outcomes for their conduct process.

This number surprised me as I assumed it would be lower, considering the answers that were compiled previously. With most respondents saying that they had not received training that was deep into educational theory (see Finding 7 below), I was surprised that a majority believed that they were acting as educators. However, I was also pleased to see this response. Reflecting on my personal experience, I know that sometimes it can be hard to see oneself as an educator within this role. There are a number of frustrations that come along with conduct work, and it can be easy to become discouraged, but to see that a majority of respondents still are working to set students on the right path was a positive takeaway for me as a researcher and a student affairs professional.

Finding 13: A Majority of Conduct Processes Do Not Have Learning Outcomes

When asked if their institution developed specific learning outcomes related to the conduct process, 23 out of 34 (68%) answered no, and 11 (32%) responded yes. This finding also caused me to step back and evaluate my assumptions. When designing an educational experience, learning outcomes are usually a standard way of gauging what a student learns from the material. While each conduct case can vary due to the circumstances of the case, the fact that so few institutions were engaging in developing learning outcomes was shocking.

Finding 14: The Conduct Process is Not Driven by Learning Theory.

The findings do not demonstrate that, despite being an educational endeavor, the conduct process is based in learning theory. Respondents shared awareness of various learning theories, but none stated that they were the driving force for their conduct process. The following question asked if the student conduct process at their institution is guided by any specific learning theories. Twenty-six (76%) responded no, and eight (24%) replied yes. The subjects were then asked to elaborate on their responses. Similar to Finding 1, it is surprising that this process that is so deeply connected to education does not have a specific learning theory attached to it. We do not even find that those theories that are listed are consistent. One person divulged that the student conduct process at their institution is based on the theories of Kohlberg (1958), a researcher who studied and wrote about moral development. Two additional respondents mentioned that their process was based on restorative justice practices. Restorative justice is a theme that continues to come in up in this research. Another two individuals mentioned that the ideas of Chickering (1969), who researched college student development, were the guiding principles of their college's student conduct philosophy, and one respondent reported that the theories of Schlossberg (1981), who researched transitions and how they impact our thoughts and behaviors, grounded the conduct process.

This information aligns with the data collected from the first question, which asked if the participants had been provided any learning theory, to which 74% replied no. Here, 76% said no, which means that the other 24% provided additional information on the type of theory which they learned. While conduct lies at a nexus of a number of theories, it can be difficult to select one that fits best. I think that hearing officers should learn about moral development, college student development, and transformative and experiential learning in order to understand the intent of this process and see how these theories would enhance understanding the experience of our students.

In order to provide structure to an educational process, it is important to ground it in theory and knowledge. While student conduct appears to pull some elements from learning theory, it is not driven or guided by theory. I feel that by not doing so, hearing officers are given expectations of an outcome, but not provided the tools with which to achieve that outcome. Not properly preparing staff could have an impact on the students' experience. Conduct is meant to teach students to be accountable as they enter the real world; by not directly making the link between learning theory and practice, we could be sending students conflicting messages.

Finding 15: A Majority of Institutions are Not Conducting Assessment on Their Conduct Process.

The next question asked if the respondent's institution conducts any formal assessment of the student conduct process. This kind of assessment would show if their institution is monitoring how their process influences student behavior, and how students feel about going through the process. Twenty (59%) responded no, and 14 (41%) answered yes. The follow-up question asked how they were collecting this data, and 14 responded. Three replied that they used Survey Monkey software, and four mentioned Qualtrics for data collection. Four indicated an electronic collection of data but did not specify a specific program. The remaining three replied that face-to-face follow-up meetings were the preferred method for gathering student feedback.

Assessment is important because it is how we learn what is working and where changes need to be made. For conduct, I recommend that yearly feedback is taken from two constituencies, a survey of the students who went through the process, and one that asks the hearing officers for their perspective. As the people who conduct most of the conduct hearings, it is important that hearing officers have a voice and can share their thoughts with senior leadership. It is only through learning how the current process is perceived by both students and hearing officers that the process can be improved.

I am not surprised that a majority of institutions disclosed that they are not conducting assessment of their student conduct process. I feel that many institutions may not do so, based upon the assumption that students will respond negatively in an assessment about what appears to be a disciplinary practice. However, by not learning from the target of the process, students, the practitioners, hearing officers, and student affairs staff are missing out on hearing from important voices in this experience.

While students may not appreciate being held accountable for underage drinking, it is still important to assess what they took away from the hearing experience. Did they learn anything new about themselves, or about their decision-making process? Asking pointed questions about the experience that students went through will help administrators design better hearings and could address some training issues with staff.

Hearing from hearing officers can be equally valuable. These staff members are the ones in the room, putting the process designed by others into practice. How do they feel the process meets the needs of the students? What additional training can be provided, or skills do they wish that they had, that could help produce an outcome that will benefit the student? Assessment is essential when looking at a process or procedure. It can help highlight areas that need to be addressed or changed. It can also reveal opportunities for growth and improvement. I believe this finding demonstrates why assessment is so important.

In the institutions in which I have served as a hearing officer, only one conducted and disseminated assessment materials. Feedback was solicited both from the students going through the process and the hearing officers who conducted the hearings, and changes were made to reflect data collected. Working at this institution provided me with the experience to see how assessment can positively impact a process.

Interview Findings

Once the questionnaire was completed, I conducted five follow-up interviews with volunteer participants of the questionnaire. Participants on the questionnaire were asked to indicate an interest in participating in the follow-up interview. Seven individuals volunteered, but only five responded to a request to participate. Each interview lasted between 25 and 42 minutes. While the questionnaire was intended to collect a broad number of responses from people about their experiences as hearing officers, the individual interviews were intended to provide additional detail. All five participants were in-residence hall directors, who served as hearing officers as part of their responsibilities. I provided each participant with a pseudonym that is gender matched. I have identified the five participants as Adam, Ben, Christine, Debbie, and Emily. Each interviewee's background, with a description of their institution, is found in Table 1 below.

At the beginning of each interview, I sought to gather some data on the interview subjects. I asked how long they had been at their current institution to understand the depth of knowledge and experience at their current place of employment. Next, I asked how many years of professional experience they have in student affairs. Finally, I asked about the residential population at their current place of employment.

Table 1

Interview Subject Summary

Name	**Time at Current Institution**	**Number of Years of Experience**	**Size of Current Institution**
Adam	6 months	2 years	Over 3000 beds
Ben	2 years	2 years	Fewer than 2000
Christine	6 years	6 years	3300 beds
Debbie	3 years	10 years	4000 beds
Emily	7 years	9 years	3500 beds

Note: Summary data of the number of years employed at their current institution, number of years of professional experience, and the size of their current institution's residential population.

RQ1 How are Hearing Officers Trained for their Roles?

No interview data related to the training that the hearing officers received for their role. No questions were crafted to specifically learn about their training. Questions related to training were on the questionnaire. Questions for the individual interviews were mostly focused on current experiences, their perceptions and analysis of the conduct system at their current employer, and suggestions for changes in the future.

RQ2. Do Hearing Officers Feel that the Practice of Student Conduct at their University is Meeting the Goals of Developing the Whole Student Including, Character, Values, and Life Skills?

Finding 16: No Specific Student Development or Learning Theories Were Incorporated into Process Design

When participants were asked if there were any specific learning or student development theories incorporated into the conduct process at their institutions, the answers varied. Interview respondents spoke about their personal goals when trying to connect with a student and what they hoped the student took away from the hearing. During his individual interview, Adam, who had two years of professional experience, but only six months at his current institution, divulged that he does not focus on developmental theories in his conduct hearing. Adam said, "Something that I personally use, which isn't necessarily a student development theory, is person-centered theory. Where I can focus on the individual[s], and what they want, and how I can help them achieve their goals." He wanted to know about their goals and aspirations, and that he is there to help them achieve success. Adam wants them to reflect on what happened through the lens of the goals they are hoping to achieve. He asks questions like: "Is there a more positive way you can be spending your time?" For example, Adam added, "If they say they want to own their own business, I always ask if drinking in this way is helping them achieve that goal." Adam feels that grounding this type of incident discussion in real-world consequences can provide a stronger impact.

For Ben, a second-year RD at his institution, the conversation at the conduct hearing is an opportunity for the student to have a positive outcome emerge from a negative experience. He responded that he focuses on developing the whole person, not just addressing the specific incident. Ben added that he believes this reflects the mission of his institution and of its student affairs staff.

Christine, who was into her sixth year as an RD at her institution, and Emily, who had nine years of professional experience, with seven of them at the same institution, work at different institutions. However, they recounted similar experiences in that no specific learning theory has been shared with them regarding their conduct process. Both revealed that they have been told that their process is focused on education and helping the students learn, but nobody had elaborated on a specific developmental or learning theory.

Debbie, who had ten years of professional experience, but only three at her current institution, commented there is no single guiding developmental theory for conduct at her institution. When she meets with students, Debbie aims for an educational moment. She describes the excitement she feels when something seems to “click” for the student. Debbie replied she wants them to learn something new or find a new resource on campus. She wants students to know the residential staff members on campus, and how the hearing officer can help students access resources on campus.

This finding confirms what was found in the questionnaires; there is no specific learning theory used in student conduct. However, the answers did indicate that the hearing officers were all invested in the way that students grow and learn from their experiences. Even Christine and Emily, who specifically stated that no learning theory was taught to them, still expressed that the educational value of the experience was highlighted by their institutions.

This finding demonstrates to me that the educational value, and the ability for a student to grow from their experiences, are principles held within student conduct. While there is no one-size-fits-all theory currently used to design a process, there is still a fundamental value of student growth that institutions have embraced.

Finding 17: The Desired Outcome for a Student Going Through Conduct Is Developmental

When asked what the desired outcome is for a student who goes through the student conduct process, Adam responded that he wants to build a relationship with the student, and that the desired outcome of the conversation is that the student does not repeat the same behavior. Adam asserted that he always wants students to have a plan of how they will avoid being involved in a similar situation again.

Ben wants the student to develop as a whole person. He articulated he wants the student to understand what his/her actions were and to comprehend why the consequences are being applied. Ben wants the student to ask him/herself if this lifestyle and these behavioral choices are beneficial. He added, “I want them to decide what is the cost/benefit analysis of continuing this behavior in and out of college.”

Christine wants to make a connection with the students she meets with. She replied that her goal is to work with the student to determine why a particular incident happened. She is careful to ask if there is something else going on in the student’s life. She also determines if the students are aware of the policies and the reasons these policies exist. As well, she wants to focus on how conduct officers can help students make different decisions in the future. She wants students to learn from their decisions and to understand how their actions impacted the community.

Debbie reported that her hope is that students have an educational moment, “Whether that means not doing it again, or that they learn something new about themselves, or a new resource on campus”. She concluded by articulating that one important thing she wants them to walk away with is the knowledge that she can be a resource for them for other issues besides conduct.

Emily replied she does her best to make sure students know they are not being pre-judged. She wants to hear from them and wants them to understand she knows that they are not bad people. A conduct hearing is not about judging them. However, she wants the students to reduce their participation in risk-taking behaviors. She wants to know about their entire academic experience in order to assist them with choosing to change their behavior. Emily commented that her school focuses on the whole student. and a well-rounded experience. She argued that having students select some of the sanctions for themselves is a great way for them to have buy-in for the process.

The responses under this finding show that hearing officers want the students to leave their hearings with greater awareness. This awareness could be of themselves, their surroundings, their role in the community, or of different campus resources. All of the responses talked about giving students an opportunity to look at their behaviors objectively and walk away with more awareness than when they entered the hearing.

I did not find this answer surprising, as this is how the hearing process is framed for hearing officers. This finding certainly reflects my experience. However, I was delighted to see the passion and the investment these individuals put into their answers. They wanted to experience genuine growth and change in their students, in a non-judgmental, neutral setting. The sincerity of their responses was a nice reminder of the passion that hearing officers can have for their work.

Finding 18: A Majority of Interview Subjects Utilize Standardized Sanctions as Part of the Conduct Process.

When asked about whether their institution used standardized sanctions for alcohol and drug violations, or if the sanctions were unique to each student, Adam replied his institution does utilize standard sanctions for some policy violations. For example, students with first-time alcohol and marijuana violations are assigned an online alcohol or marijuana use assessment and perform community service hours. “I feel like by focusing on making sure all of our students get the same sanction experience, we lose some of the ability to meet the needs of the individual student,” Adam commented, adding that standard sanctions often create a roadblock to helping the student learn from the situation.

Ben expressed that his school puts students on month-long probation for the first alcohol violation. In addition to the probationary status, students are assigned one additional educational sanction, which the hearing officer assigns. Ben shared that hearing officers are encouraged to be creative and assess what they believe will be the best way to help the particular student learn from the experience.

Christine responded that her institution provides recommended sanctions for each violation. She noted that hearing officers have the freedom to adjust the sanctions to the students and their particular needs. She added that if the hearing officer believes that the standard sanction will not assist the student in question, then her institution supports the hearing officers’ developing their own sanctions.

Debbie revealed that her institution provides hearing officers a grid of the type of policy violation and the severity (i.e., first-time violation, a second-time violation) and the recommended sanction. However, she stated that she also could adapt those sanctions and is encouraged to assign sanctions that will be impactful for the student.

Emily answered she hates standardized sanctions, which her institution also has as part of their process. She noted that her institution does allows hearing officers to tailor sanctions to meet the student needs. The students then select from a provided list two sanctions that the students believe will be most beneficial for them. Emily divulged that her university feels it is important that the student voice be a part of the decision-making process. She revealed that she struggles to get older students to understand the sanctions and consequences of their actions and wants to break down barriers and help them succeed.

The recurring theme of the inability of some hearing officers to develop their own sanctions once again is illustrated in this finding. A majority use standardized sanctioning as part of their conduct process. While some disclosed that they could adapt or alter the sanctions, we still see that sanction assignment is still heavily regulated in conduct processes. My assumption would be that this is out of an abundance of caution for equity in the conduct process. The students who commit the same violations should get the same outcome. While a perfectly valid way of looking at the educational process, I believe this acts as a counter to the goal of providing the individual student a developmental opportunity.

Finding 19: Hearing Officers Like the Process and Feel It Helps Students

The following question asked the participants whether they felt the conduct process is designed to maximize the impact for the students. Adam argued that he does not think the conduct process is designed to maximize change in students. He believes that students simply learn how to not be caught violating policy in the future. He believes that sometimes punitive sanctions can be educational, by having students face real consequences, which he feels is a part of a good life lesson.

Ben stated that his institution puts a hold on accounts if students do not complete their conduct sanctions, meaning that they cannot register for classes for a future semester or participate in some campus activities. The philosophy at his institution is that students need to learn the consequences of their actions and that participation in the conduct process is not voluntary.

Christine stated that the conduct process is helpful and lets the hearing officers get to know students. She added that the paperwork and administrative process are harmful to education. Christine felt that once the conversation gets going, they need to interrupt the flow to have the student sign a document or update some paperwork. She noted that she looks forward to opportunities to discuss behavior with students and provide them with something to think about after the hearing.

Debbie explained that her school talks about educational impact quite a bit. She said the flexibility that her school gives her to develop sanctions for the student aids in her providing him/her an educational experience. She added that the process allows her to connect students with resources like the counseling center.

Emily explained that her institution does well at approaching the student as a well-rounded individual. She noted that her institution provides a lot of reflective opportunities for students to look at themselves and think about the decisions that they have made. Emily believed that this is the most impactful way to approach students.

While some interviewees were frustrated by the process, a majority feel that it is helpful in assisting them to reach students. They talked about the individual experiences that students are able to receive and the educational opportunities that hearing officers are able to provide. Adam opined that sometimes the conduct process missed the mark, and Ben disclosed that his school took a more practical approach. The other three divulged that they had the opportunities they needed to engage their students.

I was surprised by some of the responses being so positive. Due to some of the preceding answers, I expected a more ambivalent response to how the process is designed to impact students. I was pleased to see that so many people have strong and positive feelings toward their work within student conduct.

RQ 3. What is the Lived Experience of the Hearing Officer?

Finding 20: A Majority of Hearing Officers Feel that Students Learn From Their Experiences.

The following question posed to the participants was based upon their experience: What do you believe students take away from the conduct process? Adam disclosed that he believes students learn not to be caught. Sometimes they just avoid being caught to keep from going through the hearing process. He divulged that they also learn that the more they are caught violating policy, the worse the outcome, so it is in their best interest to not be caught violating policy again.

Ben said that students need to learn that the stereotypical college lifestyle that some students want is not sustainable. “The image of the college lifestyle that comes from movies and tv shows, with frequent partying and heavy drinking, is not a lifestyle that sets a student up for success.” Ben added he wants students who expect this type of lifestyle to recognize it will not help them in the long run.

Christine answered that often students walk away with an understanding of how their choices impacted the community. She shared that students on her campus are more than willing to take responsibility and learn from their choices. In her opinion, the impact students have on others is the biggest thing that students understand after a hearing.

Debbie admitted that while on occasion students do learn how to navigate away from drinking and drugs, she feels some students do not find the process helpful. She is quoted as saying, “It really depends on their attitude, especially as the students get older and hit legal drinking age. Then the conversations get harder.”

Debbie said that the best part of the process is that hearing officers can design individual sanctions: “We can provide students sanctions that work for them, such as meeting with the counseling center, meeting with their RA, or even something restorative to the community.” She revealed that this alone goes a long way in helping her feel she is having an impact.

Emily has a more positive outlook and believes that students get a better understanding of how their behaviors impact others. She stated that at her institution a conduct points system is used, and if you gain too many points, you can lose your housing privileges. She divulged that her institution does a lot of emphasis on community programming and how to work within the community.

A majority of respondents in this question felt that students did grow from their experiences and took something away from the hearing. While Adam and Debbie did share that in some cases, they did not feel that students found the process helpful, Ben, Christine, and Emily recounted that they did sense that students walked away with a better understanding than they had at the start of the process.

I was not shocked to see that while some had a positive outlook, others were more cautious in their optimism. Some answers showed that hearing officers felt they were able to reach a student and give him/her a positive experience, while others revealed that they struggled to reach students at times. Reflecting on my experience, I know there were times I made a genuine connection with students and helped them see something in themselves or their behaviors that they needed to change. At other times, a student left the hearing, and I was frustrated at my inability to help him/her make that connection. Student conduct can be challenging at times and these responses seem to reflect the duality that hearing officers can feel about their ability to reach students.

Finding 21: Hearing Officers Do Not Find It Difficult to Balance the Needs of Their Position in Relation to the Individual Development of the Student

The next question asked of the subjects was how they would describe the balance between reinforcing the institution's values and expectations, and the individual development of the student and their values in their process. Adam does not believe that balancing enforcing the institution's values and the individual's development is as difficult as some say it is. Adam noted:

> I don't think that is a hard thing to balance. College is a microcosm of the world and there are many social things I do not agree with. Still, I enforce those things, even if I do not agree with them. I think colleges always need to balance things. I try to get on a student's level and let them know I understand why they do not agree with the policy and help them understand why. I ask questions like: 'How does being in this meeting with me help you achieve your goals?' If you can balance educating these students and helping

them achieve their goals, you will be okay. Everything we do is meant to enhance the student's experience and help them achieve their goals.

Ben replied that one of his institutions is welcoming everyone without distinction and formulating the whole person. He expressed that it is helpful in these conversations to return to that core value of the institution and show how the students can grow from this experience. He also said that is can be useful to explain why policies exist so that students understand they are not being arbitrarily brought into the conduct system.

Christine expressed that she tries to get to know the students and learn about their experience at the start of the hearing. She revealed she does struggle with assigning monetary fines to students, as that creates a hardship for the large first-generation population on her campus.

Debbie argued she knows students will not read every policy, so she wants to make sure students leave with an understanding of the basic policies. She reported she tries to build a relationship with each student, and she aims to help them achieve a goal, which is going to have a longer-lasting impact. But she finds it hard to have that moment with some students: "Sometimes they don't learn anything from our conversations and just learn how to not get caught. I think a lot of students do not find these meetings helpful. Especially upper-class students, they tend to have a negative attitude about conduct."

Emily responded that she just clarifies the expectations that the university has of students and what is not allowed on campus. She reminds them that their main purpose is academics. She responded that she tells the students she is here to represent the university and she is here for the students.

Respondents demonstrated that they feel that they can serve as an agent of the university, and still meet the needs of the individual student. While this can be a delicate balance at times, none of the subjects expressed great frustration with this important part of their role. Once again, the skill of relationship building became an important part of the work to be done in order to serve the student. Open and direct conversations are a tool to reach students through this process.

Finding 22: It Is Difficult to Balance being an Educator in an Administrative Process

The next question related to the hearing officers' balancing being an administrator who accomplishes tasks in a timely manner and their serving as an educator to students. Responses revealed additional frustrations. Adam recounted that his biggest hurdles in making this positive connection from a negative experience are the volume of cases and the limited time he can spend with each student. He stated:

> I think the difficulty can be the volume of cases. I want to have these meaningful conversations with these students, and it can be hard to do when you know you have five more students waiting and you are trying to get everything done. It is important to be efficient but still give students those times to reflect and it can be a struggle to do both.

Ben stated that sometimes it can be hard to reach students:

> The biggest hurdle for me is just getting them in the room. They do not read emails any more and they miss meetings. We have to have students go to their doors and drag them to my office. I can't build a positive relationship with a student who isn't present for the meeting.

Ben does his best to set aside ample time for each student. He schedules a 30-minute hearing but leaves 45 minutes in order to make sure that, if there is something the students want to talk about, he isn't rushing them out the door. However, with such a heavy caseload, he finds that sometimes he must do so.

Christine's biggest obstacle to seeing herself as an educator is the paperwork. She remarked:

> We certainly have some things hindering success. The student conduct process is very paperwork-heavy and very form-based. Sometimes the paperwork gets in the way of the discussion with the student. The process is meant to be educational, but I do believe that its impact is lessened because of the paperwork.

She argued that taking notes while someone is talking, in order to meet the administrative demands of the conduct hearing, can be a hindrance when the student needs to be the focus of her attention.

Debbie added that the level of engagement between her and the student is all up to the student. If the student is engaged and wants to participate in the process, then she finds they can have a meaningful conversation. She wants to have an impact on students who want to improve their behavior.

Emily revealed that she does struggle with being an educator and finishing her tasks. She believes her difficulties can depend on the level of the students' experience. She finds first-year students tend to be more open to changes in behavior, where upper-class or older students tend to be more set in their ways. She strives to make sure that her students are focused during the hearing and she aims to take down barriers and let students know she cares, which should aid in building some trust. Emily stated:

> Sometimes I struggle to do that. I must do what I have to do. My job is to educate, and I should not be beating my head against the wall to do so. Higher-level cases like

> suspension from school may take longer, but I try to limit these to no more than one hour and 15 minutes. I also try to make sure that students are focused. I feel I must break down barriers, and let students know that I want to hear from them. If you just show yourself as someone who is focused on rules, they [students] won't trust you.

The interviews show that some hearing officers struggle with balancing being an educator and an administrator. Adam feels that the volume of cases reduces the time he can spend with the individual student. Adam and Ben both felt that they found it difficult to reach some students, and the process was not truly developmental.

Standardized sanctions are another area where frustration manifests. The interview subjects state it is difficult to be an educator in some systems when you do not have the freedom to design an educational sanction but must select from a list. Allowing hearing officers more control over the sanctions that they assign may go a long way toward helping to assuage these concerns and providing hearing officers with a feeling of ownership.

Christine talks about how the paperwork in her process slows down her process. She revealed that her university is very paperwork-heavy, and when she is trying to find a connection with a student, she is required to ask them to complete a form. This concern matches what came from the questionnaire results, where they argued that the process was too focused on paperwork.

The effort to maintain this balance of educator and administrator can be difficult. Having experienced this struggle myself in the past, I was not surprised by this finding. The variety of responsibilities that residence hall directors have, and the amount of time they are expected to invest in each one of them, are often conflicting. It can be a difficult balance to strike while serving in this important role. As a hearing officer, I have experienced all of the frustration that the participants discussed, and I know how difficult it can be at times to act as an educator in a process that has significant administrative responsibilities.

RQ 4. What Institutional Processes Influence the Hearing Officer's Experience?

Finding 23: Institutional History is a Factor in the Design of the Conduct Process.

I asked each interview participant if they knew of any historical influences on their institution's conduct process. Adam commented, "Not that I am aware of. However, I do know that we have become more relaxed over the years. In years past, I heard that students used to be kicked off campus or suspended just for drinking." Adam noted that the university is currently facing some issues with low residence hall occupancy, and in order to keep students on campus, being more lenient than it once was. "Students used to be removed from housing for their first marijuana violation, because there was a long waiting list of students who wanted to take their place. Now we are much more relaxed, and give more warnings, because we need to keep students on campus."

Ben answered that his institution is very aware that they offer housing to a large number of first-generation college students:

> We have a large population of first generational (sic) students. We are very intentional about the kinds of sanctions we impose. Monetary fines, for example, can place a huge burden on these students, since so many come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. We have policies and procedures that were adjusted based on our history.

He also uttered that his institution responds quite harshly to guest policy violations, as a student was stabbed in a residence hall several years earlier, due to a lack of proper security systems.

Christine shared that the process at her institution was influenced in its design as a legal process since it was created by a former staff member who was a lawyer: “Our last director in the Office of Community Standards was a lawyer who developed an investigation model for approaching conduct. It has been a relatively new process and is gaining traction, and that is pretty unique**.”** She noted that their process is very administrative and paperwork-heavy, which does not always lead to building strong relationships with students.

Debbie and her institution focus on every interaction being developmental. Debbie commented:

> We have a campus culture that is focused on being developmental, so we have removed fines as sanctions; we have made violations that used to be ‘one and done’ now get three or four strikes. Even with the names of the documents we use, we are careful with our language. We use ‘Guide to Residential Living”, rather than ‘Student Code of Conduct.’

Her university has worked to remove fines and other monetary sanctions for behavior, which were putting students of lower socioeconomic status at a disadvantage.

Debbie stated that staff has a lot of input to how the process is designed. She said that each year the entire staff gathers to work on adjustments to the process that may improve the student experience, which has allowed them to stay progressive.

Emily replied that no specific philosophy is guiding the process at her institution: “We really do everything we can to help the individual student. We want to understand what the students are going through, and how we can help.”

All respondents expressed that there was some level of influence on their process based upon the individual institution. Christine’s process was heavily influenced by someone with legal training, as opposed to educational training, which may explain the administratively heavy process.

Having worked at five different universities throughout my career, I was not surprised that many institutions design their process or make changes to the process due to factors unique to the institution. Ben said that his institution services a number of first-generation college students, and that they know they have to address the needs of these students. Eliminating fines was something they did to ensure that no student would be at a disadvantage due to their socio-economic status. Debbie and Emily both state their universities go out of their way to focus their efforts on the development of the student. As can be seen from these results, conduct hearings for one interview subject were guided by multiple perspectives. One institution had a developmental perspective, one from a legal framework, one an individualized focus, one based upon the institution's history of serving first-generation college students, and the other disclosed no guiding historical perspective. Four out of the five respondents reported that the history of their institution did influence the development of their conduct process.

Not all colleges operate in the same way, and not all serve the same type of students. An institution whose core group of students were first-generation, lower-income students, may operate differently than an Ivy League institution. There would still need to be some flexibility built into the system for universities to embrace their unique qualities.

Finding 24: A Majority of Institutions Are Not Engaging in Assessment

I then asked Adam what kind of assessment, if any, is conducted on his institution's conduct process. He replied:

> We have the ability to do follow-up meetings, if we feel it is necessary. I don't find myself doing that too often, but we can if we are worried about a student, for example, if

a student mentions a mental health issue, or if a student is questioning whether college is for them.

When asked about whether his institution conducts any assessment of the conduct process, Ben noted that students at his institution receive an email at the end of the hearing with a link to a questionnaire about their experience. He shared that his institution did change some processes, based on student feedback.

Christine disclosed that her institution has not conducted any assessment in the past but is looking to do so. Students will receive an email at the end of the hearing reminding them of their sanctions and providing a link to a questionnaire to provide feedback.

Debbie answered that her institution has tried an electronic feedback system, but students have not provided much information. The questionnaire is voluntary, so students do not always provide constructive feedback. Debbie articulated that she finds students sometimes find the hearings helpful, and other times she does not think the students possess much investment in the process. She believes that hearings are much easier with first-year students, who are new to the college experience, and more willing to reflect and change. She reported she struggles to connect with older students, as they already have developed their thoughts and feelings toward alcohol and drug use and are often defensive in the conduct hearing. She added she does not feel like sanctioning students helps them very much, but prefers a restorative- justice-focused process, where students who violate policy give back to the community.

Emily revealed that her institution really wants students to send feedback on their experience. After the hearing, the student receives an email every three days until he/she has taken the questionnaire. For Emily, the lesson learned is that students’ actions affect others. She shared that they take away knowledge of the conduct process and how the university expects them to be acting in the future in order to remain successful on campus.

The results of the interview show that not enough institutions are conducting their own assessment of the conduct process. We saw that this was confirmed by the questionnaire results as well. If we want to assess our abilities to reach our students, we must ask them for their perspectives on their experiences. However, we also need to speak with those staff members who are conducting these hearings. Those that are expected to execute these processes need to be heard from as well. My concern continues to be that, without assessment from both the students and the hearing officers, it is difficult to know where improvements need to be made or opportunities exist for enhancing the student experience.

Interview Theme Summary

Several themes came out of the interviews: (1) institutional history as an influence on the conduct process, (2) student development theory, (3) desired outcome of the conduct hearing, (4) frustrations with conduct, and (5) acting as an educator.

Interview Theme 1: Institutional History as an Influence on the Conduct Process

As can be seen from these results, conduct hearings for one interview subject were guided by multiple perspectives. One institution had a developmental perspective, one from a legal framework, one an individualized focus, one based upon the institution's history of serving first-generation college students, and the other reported no guiding historical perspective. Four out of the five respondents did report that the history of their institution influenced the development of their conduct process.

Interview Theme 2: Development Theory in Conduct

These results show that two of the interview participants focused on the student's individual growth and development. One interview participant noted that the main goal was building a connection with the student and seeing if that student's surface behaviors were indications of a deeper problem. One divulged that they hoped to help the student achieve an educational moment that would change their perspective. Finally, the last interviewee shared that they hoped to help the student reduce risk-taking behavior.

Interview Theme 3: Desired Outcome

When discussing the desired outcome of conduct hearings, one interview participant stated that he/she wanted to build a relationship with the students. One disclosed that he/she wanted the students to ask themselves if their choices are benefitting their educational and life goals. One remarked that he/she wanted the students to know resources on campus, while two other interviewees noted that they wanted the student to learn how his/her choices impact others.

Interview Theme 4: Frustrations with Conduct

When discussing their frustrations with the conduct process, one respondent revealed that he felt in some cases that punitive sanctions, as opposed to developmental ones, may have more effect on the student. One noted that he found it hard to reach students and help them make the connection that the stereotypical college lifestyle may not be sustainable for academic success. Another explained that paperwork and administrative processes get in the way of building a solid relationship with the student. The final two participants both stated that building a trusting relationship is the hardest goal to accomplish within the context of a student conduct hearing.

Interview Theme 5: Acting as an Educator

When discussing how they view themselves as educators, one participant talked about helping students achieve their goals, another discussed the overall growth of the whole person, while another discussed the individually designed sanctions as the way she most reported that she was educating the student. The final two spoke of barriers to feeling like an educator, such as paperwork, and setting aside enough time to meet the student's needs. Table 2 offers an overview of the major findings from the interview data.

Table 2

Five Findings Emerging from Interview Data

	Adam	**Ben**	**Christine**	**Debbie**	**Emily**
Finding 1- Institutional History as an Influence on the Conduct Process	Current institution is not as strict due to concerns about occupancy	Institution has large number of students from lower socioeconomic background	Process was modeled after a legal process by previous staff member who was an attorney	Everything is designed around development	Focus on the growth of the individual student.
Finding 2- Development Theory	Person-centered theory	Focuses on development of the whole person	Make a strong connection & help decision-making	Help students understand their poor decisions	Reassure them they are not being judged

Finding 3- Desired Outcome	Ensure student does not repeat behavior	Want them to ask if this lifestyle is beneficial	Understand how their actions impacted the community	How they can make better decisions in the future	Focuses on developing whole person
	Adam	**Ben**	**Christine**	**Debbie**	**Emily**
Finding 4- Frustrations with Conduct	Standardized sanctions do not work. Punitive can be better	It can be hard to reach students and get them to attend hearings	Paperwork-heavy process and tight timeline	Sometimes engaging students in the process can be a struggle	Getting students to engage in the process can be a struggle
Finding 5- Acting as Educator	Focus on values of the student and how their actions are reflecting those values	Focusing on whole person development helps students realize their actions are not contributing to their goals	Hard to make developmental connection with so much paperwork	Allowed to design individual sanctions to affect the student	Difficult as students get older; it can be harder to reach them

Five themes emerged from this research that help illustrate the lived experience of the hearing officers. When the hearing officers discuss the history of the conduct process at their respective institutions, they focus on the design of the process, and how they feel students can best learn from this experience. When they discussed the desired outcome, it was about their personal investment in what they hoped students took from their hearings. When the hearing officers talked about frustrations, they were identifying obstacles that they felt impeded having a better connection with the student. Finally, when they talked about acting as an educator, they were referencing their attempts at serving as one in a process designed to be administrative.

Summary

This chapter presented the 24 findings of this study. Findings were organized according to the research questions. The questionnaire data, as well as the individual interview questions, revealed the experiences of the participants. Quotations from the participants were included to support the findings. By using direct quotes, I hope to build confidence in the accuracy of the perceptions of the individuals as described.

The first finding of this study (which addressed the first research question) is that a majority of hearing officers are not trained on learning theory. The answers provided by 71% of the respondents confirmed that they had not received any specific training on learning theory. For an educational process, it would be logical to assume that some learning theory or concept is attached to the training provided. I was shocked to learn that most hearing officers did not receive training in any learning theory.

The second finding of this study, also addressing the first research question, is that a majority of hearing officers are trained on the administrative process and the conduct philosophy. This finding is that 76% of the respondents received training on the administrative process, as well as on conduct philosophy. This finding makes me question how the conduct philosophy was explained to the hearing officers. As we learned from Finding 1, no learning theory was attached to that training for a majority of respondents.

The third finding of this study from the first research question is that most hearing officers are not trained on how to design educational sanctions. Results show that over half of respondents, 53%, had not received any specific training on designing educational sanctions. Educational sanctions are an important part of the conduct process, as students are challenged to continue to reflect on the decisions that they made. However, a majority had not received any specific training on how to design these important assignments.

The study's fourth finding addressed the second research question. It was that hearing officers want to know more about their students. Some 67% of respondents spent the first part of a conduct meeting trying to get to know the students. The respondents said that they asked about classes and hobbies and tried to learn more about the student before engaging in discussion of the behavior that trigged the conduct meeting. This was important in building trust and rapport with the student.

The study's fifth finding also stemmed from the second research question: hearing officers have suggestions on how to improve the conduct process. When asked how the conduct experience could be improved, responses varied from reduction of paperwork, integrating restorative justice techniques, better training in the design and application and sanctions, and having professional hearing officers that can dedicate more time to the individual student. This finding showed that hearing officers are invested in the conduct process and want to improve it for the benefit of the student.

The study's sixth finding (which addressed the third research question) is that a majority of hearing officers are hearing cases concerning drugs and alcohol. and these are the most common types of cases they hear. I did not find this information surprising as drinking and drug use behaviors are often what college-age students group struggle to overcome.

The study's seventh finding, also a product of the third research question, was that those conduct officers who heard other types of cases said they ranged from noise to sexual misconduct violations. I was surprised that someone at the entry level said that they were hearing such high-level conduct cases. However, this finding confirmed for me that the needs of the institution may dictate the types of cases, and therefore the experience of the hearing officer.

The study's eighth finding, again from the third research question, was that most hearing officers spend one to three hours per week in conduct. This number will vary based upon the type of institution and how large its campus population is. It surprised me that the number was so low, as I expected it to be much higher.

The study's ninth finding (addressing the third research question) was that conduct officers believe that open and direct conversation was the best way to reach students today. Breaking down the barriers that exist in a conduct hearing can be a challenge, and hearing officers need to find a way to reach the students. This finding shows that a majority believe that open and direct conversations are the best way to make the initial connection.

The study's tenth finding addressed the fourth research question. It was that a majority of hearing officers assign sanctions from a list. This finding seems to recur as an issue for hearing officers. The desire to be creative and meet the needs of students is something that is clear from both questionnaire and interview results. However, hearing officers do struggle with their inability to design and assign sanctions.

The study's 11th finding also addressed the fourth research question: many institutions are engaging in proactive educational efforts to reduce the number of conduct violations on their campus. While having a strong conduct process is important for violations that occur, it can be equally beneficial to cut off violations before they happen.

The study's 12th finding, resulting from the fourth research question, was that a majority of hearing officers feel like educators. Over half of the respondents, 56%, reported that they do inhabit the role of educators within the conduct process. These responses reflect the investment that hearing officers put into their relationship building, and that despite some frustrations, and an overly administrative process at times, a majority still feel they provide an educational experience for those students. I also question if the remaining 44% would feel differently if some of the skills from Finding 6 could be improved.

The study's 13th finding (which addressed the fourth research question) was that a majority of institutions are not attaching learning outcomes to their student conduct process.

The study's 14th finding, addressing the fourth research question, was that conduct is not driven by learning theory. Answering this question, 76% of respondents said that their conduct process at their institution was not guided by learning theory. This finding is supported by Finding 1. Learning theory does not currently play a large part in student conduct.

The study's 15th finding, from the fourth research question, is that not enough assessment is conducted. The individual interviews also supported Finding 9, that not enough assessment is completed. Institutions should work to improve the experiences that they offer students, by assessing their current practices.

The study's 16th finding (which addressed the second research question) was that no specific learning theory was incorporated into the design of the conduct process. This finding demonstrated that there is no specific guiding theory that propels student conduct interventions. Despite being an educational process, it is not rooted in any theory.

The study's 17th finding addressed the second research question. It is that hearing officers want to help students grow. The individual interviews show an investment in the student on the part of the hearing officer. The hearing officers each spoke to their desire for students to take something away from the hearing that will benefit them in the future. Adam talked about connecting their behavior today to their future goals. By contrast, Ben wants to develop the whole student and asks more questions about their overall college experience. Finding 10 shows that the hearing officers are invested in the student's future.

The study's 18th finding also addressed the second research question: that most hearing officers assign standard sanctions for conduct violations. The assignment of sanctions does seem to be standardized in most conduct processes. It is important that conduct officers have more control over the sanctions that they assign. Not only will this challenge them creatively, but it could boost morale for those in the position.

The study's 19th finding (which addressed the second research question) was that a majority of hearing officers like the process and feel that it does help students. While they may have some frustration regarding the conduct process, hearing officers feel that it is beneficial for students.

The study's 20th finding, addressing the third research question, is that a majority of hearing officers feel that students learn from their experiences in conduct. While some students may view student conduct proceedings as an adversarial process, a majority of hearing officers feel that students leave having learned something. I think that this is positive; despite some frustrations and administrative hurdles, overall students are learning.

The study's 21st finding (which addressed the third research question) was that hearing officers do not find it hard to balance the needs of their position with the student's individual needs. Being in a position with many administrative and time demands can be challenging. However, a majority of hearing officers feel that they can balance the needs of their students along with the needs of their positions.

The study's 22nd finding (which also addressed the third research question) was that it is difficult to balance being an educator and administrator. Despite their desire to help students, hearing officers encounter several issues that that make it a difficult balancing act at times. The volume of cases they are expected to complete, while managing all of their other tasks, the heavy paperwork, and the reliance that many institutions have on standardized sanctions, can provide some difficulty for these hearing officers.

The study's 23rd finding (which addressed the fourth research question) is that institutional history is a factor in the process. This finding showed that each institution is influenced by its own history. The paperwork-heavy process that Christine works through was designed by an attorney. Ben's institution eliminated monetary fines due to the heavy population of first-generation college students. This means that the history of the institution should be reflected in any changes that are made to the process.

The study's 24th finding (which addressed the fourth research question) was that not enough assessment is being done. In this finding, 59% responded that they do not conduct assessment on their conduct process. Findings 5 and 6 illustrate that hearing officers have suggestions on how to improve the student conduct process, or skills that they wish were included in their training. Finding 9 shows that a majority of schools are not asking their students or staff their thoughts on the current practice.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This research began as an exploration of the lived experiences of hearing officers. I sought to understand the training that hearing officers go through, and how it prepared them to serve in this important role. To conduct this research, I used the human resources approach as my theoretical framework, which explored how employers engage and empower employees to allow them to contribute to the organization's success. I used the Strategic Training of Employees Model (STEM) as a conceptual framework, which stated that the training employees receive is essential to their engagement and contributions to the organization.

For this research, I conducted a qualitative phenomenological study. Qualitative research is used when trying to learn about lived experiences of a group of people. Phenomenological research is used to capture the perceptions of those who have shared a similar life experience; in this case, they were working as resident directors, with responsibilities that include serving as a conduct hearing officer.

This chapter reviews the relevant findings, a discussion of those findings, and addresses how the data contributed to answering the research questions. Finally, I conclude this chapter by reviewing implications for the future of student affairs administrators, specifically residence hall director staff who also serve as hearing officers, as well as offering recommendations for future research.

Research Questions

At the onset of this research, I developed four research questions.

RQ1: How are hearing officers trained for their roles?

RQ2: Do hearing officers feel that the practice of student conduct in their university is meeting the goals of developing the whole student including character, values, and life skills?

RQ3: What is the lived experience of the hearing officer?

RQ4: What institutional processes influence the hearing officers' experience?

Discussion and Conclusions

RQ1: How are hearing officers trained for their roles?

Finding 1: Hearing Officers are Not Receiving Adequate Training.

The findings showed that learning theories are not an essential component of student conduct training, but respondents noted that it should be. Not only did many respondents say that they would like to have additional training on learning theory, but they also indicated they desire the incorporation of learning theory into training to help ground student conduct work in the educational aims of the university.

Learning or Developmental Theory. Based upon the findings, it does not appear that hearing officers are receiving training in the form of a learning or developmental theory. Relevant theories that would relate to the goals of student conduct would be experiential or moral development theory. From the interviews and questionnaire, it does appear that student conduct is being explained as an educational process but is not connected to a specific application of either type of theory.

Training on Philosophy of Conduct. Training seems to be an essential ingredient in developing successful hearing officers. While a majority of the respondents in the questionnaire (76%) stated that they were trained on the process and the philosophy behind the student conduct process, 71% of respondents indicated that they were not trained on any kind of developmental theory. This finding shows that hearing officers are being trained on both the administrative process that they must go through as a hearing officer, and the philosophical aims of work within student conduct. This finding demonstrates the fact that universities share the goal of providing an educational process; however, Findings 1 and 3 show that a deeper level of understanding is needed.

All of the interview participants expressed a desire to have an impact on the students' experience, but noted that they do encounter some barriers to successfully connecting to students. The hearing officers stated that it was frustrating for them to encounter a student they could not reach. Some felt it was a struggle to influence someone because the student was not developmentally ready; others expressed frustration that students did not agree with the policy that they had violated, and the officers were unable to engage them in the conversation. One respondent said that her biggest struggles were with students over age 21, when consumption of alcohol is not illegal, but remains against campus policy. These developmental or behavioral barriers can be an obstacle to executing a successful conduct hearing.

Providing staff training on engaging students in the process and how to build positive relationships may benefit the hearing officers. Training on how to develop creative sanctions that provide an individual experience to the student also would aid staff in this role. Questionnaire respondents said that 71% had not received any training or education on moral or transformative education theory. While training and education on these topics are not mandatory for a successful hearing officer, they are certainly helpful in understanding the conduct process, and hearing officers would benefit from exploring learning theory. The research indicates that providing deeper training on moral or transformative theory may be another measure that would improve hearing officer satisfaction and engagement with this role.

Much of the learning undertaken by the hearing officers came from practice in engaging in the student conduct process. The type of training they received mostly came from in-house practice, which is usually included in sessions conducted by an internal office or supervisor. Hearing officers related to the process of gaining experience through practice in serving as a conduct hearing officer.

The training that hearing officers receive is not consistent with the human resources approach. The human resources approach encourages employers to engage their employees, and to empower them with decision-making abilities over the work-related tasks that will impact their daily lives. While the hearing officers play a large role in executing the hearing, their role in designing the process is limited. If a human resources model were applied to student conduct work, then the university would task the hearing officer to review the facts of the case, and then to creatively design and assign sanctions that meet that meet the needs of the individual student. By allowing hearing officers more involvement in executing and participating in the assignment of sanctions, they will feel more engaged and have more ownership over the process.

Training on Developing Educational Sanctions. Slightly over half the respondents (56%) stated that they did not receive any kind of training on the development of creative, and impactful, sanctions. Yet, when asked to elaborate on the training they received, the most common answer was that they were encouraged to be creative, and they attended conference sessions on creative sanctioning. Their institutions did not provide any specific training that would aid their success in developing sanctions. Finding 3 once again shows that the training received is lacking in providing the tools needed for an educational experience. As educational sanctions are meant to be activities that the student will engage in after the hearing, it is important that they are appropriate to the individual student's needs. Finding 3 demonstrates that hearing officers are not being given the tools to successfully design sanctions.

RQ2: Do hearing officers feel that the practice of student conduct in their university is meeting the goals of developing the whole student including character, values, and life skills?

Finding 2: Hearing Officers Want to Know More about Their Students

Finding 4 shows that hearing officers have a deep desire to not only address the behavior of the student, but to learn about their overall experience. Hearing officers want to know more about classes and extracurricular activities that the students are engaging in during their college years. Knowing more about the student allows for a strong connection and reduces some of the adversarial appearance of the hearing.

Finding 3: Hearing Officers Believe Small Changes Can Improve Conduct

This research illustrates that hearing officers have suggestions to improve the process and make it more impactful for the students. However, in many cases they feel powerless to suggest changes, or that their opinions are not being heard by higher-level administrators. In order to improve the process, it would be beneficial for those executing and leading the hearings to have a larger role in making changes or improvements.

Finding 3: Teaching and Learning.

Another recurring theme in my research was that of teaching and learning. One question asked how the hearing officers worked to build trusting relationship with students. A significant number replied that they tried to break down barriers, by learning more about the student and engaging them in other conversations before starting the conduct hearing. The hearing officers responded that they sought to reassure students that they are not being judged; rather, they explained why the conduct hearings existed, and the goals of engaging in student conduct.

By engaging in these additional practices, conduct officers are hoping to get some buy-in from the student. The hearings could be held in a contentious fashion, where the student is lectured by the hearing officer and is given a punishment for his/her behavior. However, this practice goes against the philosophical foundation of the student conduct hearing practice. Hearing officers want to engage students and have them participate in the process. By talking to the students about other things, conduct officers demonstrate interest in the person in front of them, not just that person's behavior.

When asked about ways that the conduct process could be improved, there were several different options offered. Several said that they want the process to allow them to tailor an educational sanction to the specific student and specific violation. Many hearing officers said that one of their biggest frustrations is the imposition of mandated sanctions based upon the violation. They wanted more flexibility and the ability to be creative with their sanctions.

Overall, 85.2% of questionnaire respondents do say that they feel like an educator within the student conduct process. They responded that their systems could be improved, for example becoming less dependent on paperwork, but that overall, they feel that they are having an impact. They also want more ability to educate by developing creative sanctions themselves and removing fines, which are more punitive than educational.

All of these results show that hearing officers share a desire for student success. The hearing officers said that they want to engage the student in the process and help them reflect on their behaviors and decision-making, in the hopes that the student will gain the proper perspective for future decision-making.

A significant majority of respondents see the current process as working in the best interests of the student. All of the suggestions offered to improve conduct, including having dedicated hearing officers to ensure they have enough time to dedicate to each student, utilizing restorative justice techniques, and developing more precise sanctions, are meant to benefit the student. Even the suggestion that universities work to reduce paperwork was intended to make the process less administrative. These answers all confirm that hearing officers want the tools to allow them to provide students with a positive experience. Any experience that hearing officers lack is focused solely on how they can improve their own skills to guide a student into getting more meaning out of conduct hearings.

The traditional teacher-student model allows for teachers, who have all the knowledge, to impart it to the student, who needs it. Answers can be right or wrong, and the teacher decides what is permissible. When it comes to the student conduct process, this traditional model does not seem to fit. Reflection on behavior, and examination of the causes of that behavior, are critical to the success of the student conduct process. This project consistently showed that a majority of hearing officers want to have an impact on their students. They want a back-and-forth discussion in which the student contributes as much to the conversation as the hearing officer.

By managing the hearings in such a way, the traditional teacher-student relationship is updated to reflect current theory. The students are the experts in this case, being asked to reflect on their behavior and the causes of their actions. The students cannot provide a right or wrong answer because the discussion is about their own choices and actions. The hearing officer acts more as a sounding board and helps the student engage in the required reflection. Officers will sometimes offer feedback or ask questions that push the students to consider further options in their own decision-making process. The hearing officer, acting as an agent of the university, and enforcer of the policies of the university, retains the position of authority, but uses it to marshal resources and ensure that the student leaves having gained something from the experience.

Finding 4: Desire for Student Growth and Learning.

This finding shows that hearing officers want to show students how they can grow from their experiences. They want to help put students on the right path and provide them with the tools to make better decisions in the future. Finding number 10 shows a commitment to supporting the whole person, not just addressing their behavior, but helping them to understand that their decisions today can aid or impede reaching their future goals.

One recurring theme that became clear in responses to the research was the hearing officers' desire for processes that respect and support student development. During his interview, Adam stated that he wanted the conduct process to focus on the individual and how the conduct officer can help them grow. Adam said that when he meets with a student, he works to focus on the whole person. He tries to make sure that the student has a voice in the conversation and is allowed to bring up issues or questions he/she has. Ben mentioned that many of his students are first-generation, which means their family may not have experience in college to share with them. He says he spends significant time discussing expectations and accountability with these students. Emily indicated that she makes it clear to the student that they are not being pre-judged. She wants to talk to them about their behavior and how they can work together to reduce the risk of this behavior occurring again.

Another important goal in the conduct hearing is to educate students about policy. Adam explained that it is important that students understand what accountability looks like. Christine said that sometimes students do not understand the reasons for the policies, and she wants them to not only learn what the policy is, but the reason behind it. Even if the student does not agree with the policy, they ought to learn something about its rationale. If so, Christine believed that to be a sign of a successful meeting. Debbie said that she hopes students learn something new and become able to identify helpful on campus helpful to them.

Another common theme was the desire to help students understand the impact of their negative behavior. Adam stated that college is a microcosm of the world, and students need to understand their role in the community on campus, just as they need to understand this role after college. Christine spoke about wanting to know her students' goals in life and asking them how their actions and behaviors are helping or hindering them in reaching that goal. Emily focused her conversations on academics, reminding students that they are in college for academics and their drinking behavior can be hurting their success. She wants them to understand that involvement in student conduct violations may not be helping them to reach their goals.

All five of the interview subjects brought up the desire to build a relationship with the student. Adam explained that he hopes students see him and the student staff not as disciplinarians, but as staff who dedicate their work to helping students achieve their goals. Christine wanted students to know that they can come back to her with questions on any topic. She does not want to be seen just as someone who hands down punishment, but as a resource for students to use. Debbie said that she wants to see students have that epiphany where they suddenly "get it" and understand their role on campus. She added that one of her favorite parts of her job is when students whom she met through the conduct process come by her office to talk about a success they have had in class or in campus involvement.

Through the five interviews, some hurdles emerged in achieving success in the student conduct process. The first hurdle is that conduct hearings involve processes that are administratively demanding. All five mentioned some level of frustration with the paperwork involved. Christine says that the process at her institution was designed by an attorney, who focused on protecting the university and meeting potential legal challenges, which does not provide the opportunity for the hearing officer to have much flexibility in the conduct process. Emily answered that during the educational conversation with the student, she often has to stop to have the student sign paperwork or complete an administrative task. She said that this can become frustrating, especially when the student is really engaged in the conversation, but it needs to stop for a signature or other piece of paperwork.

Another frustration stated by all five respondents is that for at least some conduct violations, automatic or standard sanctions are required, even if they may not benefit the student. Emily and Ben both stated that their institutions require monetary fines for some violations, which creates a large hardship for their students, many of whom are first-generation and/or paying for college themselves. Christine and Adam said that they are frustrated by having to assign a standard sanction, when they do not believe the student will benefit from it.

The final theme that emerged is assessment. All five respondents indicated that their institutions do some kind of assessment of the conduct process, typically an electronic survey sent out to each student after the conduct hearing is concluded. However, none of them were aware of any findings from these surveys or had information on whether changes were made to the process, based on the feedback received.

RQ3: What is the lived experience of the hearing officer?

Finding 5: Hearing Officers Want to Improve Their Skills

The findings showed that hearing officers feel like educators, and that, through the process with which they currently work, they can reach students. However, a desire to expand their skills in order to help students is clearly demonstrated. Hearing officers want to know how to tailor educational sanctions to students in order to help them grow and develop. They want to give students a better and more personal experience.

Finding 6: Student Relationships

One of the most common themes to emerge was the desire for positive relationships with students. Both interviews and questionnaire responses showed that the conduct officers have a genuine interest in building positive relationships with students. They were invested in giving students a positive experience and helping them to learn something that they had not known before.

Multiple responses indicated that the best way to build open and trusting relationships with students was to be open and direct with them. The interviews all confirmed that these were skills they used to build positive relationships with students, which they said were needed to make a connection with the student. They also stated that asking students questions about themselves, their interests, life goals and career aspirations, helped ground the conversation a bit more, and allowed the hearing officers to make specific connections.

Most of the frustrations the subjects expressed centered around the time dedicated to the hearings. When asked on the questionnaire how to improve the process, many suggested having people with time dedicated to give each student a full hearing and provide a great experience. Conduct officers hated feeling rushed when it came to their student conduct work, as they know the impact it can have on the students.

Another issue that hearing officers raised centered around sanctions. Many expressed frustrations with assigning monetary fines to students for certain violations, as that had no impact educationally, and had a significantly negative impact on students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. One of the most common frustrations expressed was assigning universal sanctions, and not being able to design sanctions for the individual student. Conduct officers felt that this lack of decision-making capacity limited their ability to assist the student in learning from their experience.

Finding 7: Balancing Being an Educator and Administrator Can be Challenging

The administrative nature of the conduct hearing can conflict with the educational purpose. Hearing officers demonstrate a desire to help students learn, but often feel the administrative steps, paperwork and constraints on what they can assign as a sanction are limiting their abilities to be educators.

Finding 8: Theory

Out of the 34 questionnaire respondents, 26 said no specific theory guided their process. Of those respondents that indicated that a theory was central to their processes, several named a variety of theorists. Lawrence Kohlberg's (1958) moral development, Chickering's (1969) study of college student development, and Schlossberg's (1981) theory on how people adapted to transitions in life events were specifically mentioned. However, no particular theorist or learning theory is applied universally by the respondents interviewed.

Based upon the responses to the interviews and questionnaires, I concluded that offering hearing officers more training on learning theory or moral development theory may help them to ground their experience in more theoretical ways. No theory will replace the experience that is gained from serving as a conduct hearing officer, but frustrations over lack of direction in the conduct process came through both in the questionnaire and individual interviews.

RQ4: What Institutional Processes Influence the Hearing Officers' Experience?

Finding 9: A Majority of Hearing Officers Feel that They Are Educators

Overall, hearing officers do feel that they are serving as educators in the student conduct process. This finding shows that hearing officers feel good about their role and ability to impact the lives of their students. While they may possess concerns about the current process, and seek to make improvements, they do feel that they are benefitting more students.

Finding 10: Proactive Education

In the questionnaire, participants were asked if their institution did proactive education, which would educate students on policy before they have a chance to violate it. Of those who replied, 44% said their university or college did not do any proactive education. In the interviews, each conduct officer expressed an interest in making sure that students learn: (1) the reason why student conduct policies exist, (2) how they themselves can become more aware of campus policies and avoid violating policy, and (3) how to avoid violating policies in the first place. This research supports a greater use of proactive education and reducing the number of conduct violations that occur.

Finding 11: Conduct is Not Driven by Learning Theory

Conduct seems to be grounded in a philosophy, not a learning theory. The philosophy is to provide students an educational experience that will benefit them as they learn from their experiences. However, moral, experiential, and transformative learning theory are not specifically addressed.

Finding 12: Majority of Institutions Are Not Conducting Assessment on Their Conduct Process

While some institutions do conduct assessment, there does not seem to be much assessment being implemented to improve the experience. For those institutions that are conducting assessment, it does not seem that the data is shared with the hearing officers. It is important that assessment be conducted, and data disseminated to interested stakeholders, so that substantive discussions can occur, and improvements and changes can be made.

This research does support the need for additional assessment opportunities. A majority of questionnaire respondents said that their institution did not do any formal assessment on their conduct process. Only 41% said that their institutions assess their students after the conduct process. However, neither the questionnaire respondents nor the interview participants could provide any specific data or trends that their institution has found. Many of the interview participants said that they were just starting to contact students to conduct assessment of the conduct hearing process.

This leads me to believe that institutions must do a better job not only of performing assessment on the student conduct experience, but in educating their staff on what data is found. Staff who are responsible for the implementation of the student conduct process should be made aware of assessment findings. The assessment efforts taking place seem to only be focused on the student. I believe that hearing officers should also be surveyed so that they can weigh in on what they believe is most effective for the student, versus what they feel is not helpful in changing the way students look at their own behavior.

Finding 11 shows that not enough assessment is being conducted on student conduct. It is important to know not only from hearing officers, but from students how they are experiencing the conduct hearing to learn how it can be improved. The five interviews said that some level of assessment is conducted, but the data is not being shared with the staff who conduct the hearings. Universities should conduct widespread assessment and share the results with interested parties.

Finding 13: Institutional History Is a Factor

The institution where the respondents work has an effect in conduct hearing processes. Different factors can change the way that you approach conduct. Based upon the individual interviews, there are determinants such as a process designed by a lawyer rather than an educator, or a school that has a majority of first-generation college students.

The institutional history can also influence the sanctions that are offered. For example, Ben stated that his institution removed monetary fines as sanctions, as they knew their students could not afford to pay them. This is an important acknowledgement of the reality experienced by their students.

Conclusions

Upon completion of the findings of this research, I have come to the following conclusions**:**

Training for conduct officers must be improved. That is not to say that training now is not adequate for them to do the job. However, what has emerged from this research is that the hearing officers desire to deepen their skills in order to strengthen the experience that they can provide their students. I believe that providing hearing officers grounding in learning theory, such as experiential learning and moral development would be beneficial to all hearing officers and would allow them to better serve the needs of their students.

I have also concluded that training on the design and development of educational sanctions is desired by hearing officers. Sanctions are activities developed to continue the learning experience after the hearing. Too many schools are using pre-assigned lists or standard sanctions that do not adequately address the needs of the individual student. It appears that universities are emphasizing the appearance of fairness more than the unique needs of the individual and how the sanctions can be tailored to help.

University Individuality

While I do conclude that additional training is warranted, I also recognize that not every university is the same. The needs of students at a large private university will vary from those at a public university. While I believe training should be standardized, the uniqueness of every university and its ability to reach their students are especially important. Just as university history and culture have influenced the conduct process, I believe that each university must be able to adapt all of its services to the students who use them.

Assessment

This study shows that there is a need for universities to do more assessment of their practices. First, assessment should be done from the perspective of the student. Student conduct aims to reach students and provide them a new lens with which to view the world and their own activities and behaviors. It is important that we hear these voices to know how professionals can improve their skills. While students may view conduct as an adversarial process, that does not mean that they cannot provide accurate and relatable feedback that can help build stronger connections with students and allow professionals to break down barriers.

It is also clear that residence hall directors, who on most campuses serve as the primary hearing officers, are not being asked about their observations of the process. In this case, hearing officers are the front-line staff who are executing the process. As evidenced by this study, there are areas in which they want to have more training and think that improvements could be made in reaching students, but it seems that very few schools are asking these staff members about their experiences.

Genuine Interest in Student Growth and Development

One issue that has been of particular interest in this study is that there is a genuine interest in student growth and development. Hearing officers want to help their students. The interviews and questionnaire data all confirm that hearing officers talk to students before the hearing in order to show that they are interested in them, that they are not being judged by their actions, and that the hearing officer is there for them if they need to speak with someone.

This interest in student success was revealed in discussing the frustrations that come with conduct work. For example, some shared that the paperwork involved in conduct can slow down progress in a hearing. During a conversation that is going successfully, they can be required to stop and complete an additional piece of paperwork or some administrative requirement. These frustrations demonstrate that the hearing officers want to be a resource for their students.

Proactive Education

The final conclusion that comes from this study is the need to increase proactive educational efforts. Hearing officers genuinely want to show interest in their students; they can start the relationship building process by getting into the community and educating students about policies before they are broken. This will not necessarily deter all misbehavior in college students. However, this is not only a great way to engage students in active educational efforts, but also to ensure they know the expectations that come with being a member of that community.

Implications for Practice

Frustrations with Student Conduct Work

The questionnaire and the interviews brought up similar frustrations with this work on the part of hearing officers. Forced sanctions that they do not feel help their students are one source of frustration in their work for hearing officers. They want more flexibility with the sanctions they assign.

The frustrations that arise from conduct work can easily lead to burnout for hearing officers. If they feel that they need to engage in a process but are frustrated with their ability to succeed in the role, this dissatisfaction can lead to some people leaving the field or focusing on other functional areas. It is important that, as a profession, we work to resolve the frustrations that conduct officers feel.

Helping to alleviate some of these concerns may engage the staff members a bit more, and therefore, increase their buy-in and engagement. The Human Resources Model says that employees who perform the work should have a voice in the process. This is an excellent example of an opportunity for universities to listen to those on the front lines in the hearings.

Desire to Engage Students

Hearing officers also want a better way to engage their students in the process. Frequently mentioned is restorative justice, where the offender plays a role in not only determining the sanctions, but in deciding on and implementing the best way to repair the relationship with the community. This may be one area that deserves additional study.

A restorative justice model in student conduct is a common trend in student affairs. This model has become popular because it engages the accused offender as part of the process, as opposed to the hearing model which puts them in a defensive role. Finding a method to better engage students as part of the process can help to bring student conduct back to its original goal of allowing students to learn and make amends to the community which they have offended.

Assessment in Student Conduct

Responses to the question of how to improve conduct mostly focused on how to provide the student a better experience. For example, several respondents noted that having full-time hearing officers who could dedicate an extended amount of time to the individuals involved would be beneficial. Some hearing officers felt they were not giving the student the best opportunity to improve him/herself, simply because of the limited time they could spend on each case.

The hearing officers who meet with students need a voice in the process. They have suggestions on how to improve the experiences we provide students. This does not mean that the process needs to change entirely, but that there should be adequate avenues to provide feedback and suggestions to improve the student experience.

Better Student Experience

The goal of every student affairs professional is to provide college students with a positive, safe, and healthy experience. While conduct may not ever be a part of the college experience that students love, it is hoped that they walk away with a better understanding of themselves and their role in the community. This study's findings indicate that that elements of the conduct hearings that are frustrating are prohibiting hearing officers from helping students. If we remove some barriers, listen to the people in the room, and keep the goal of student growth and development in mind, hearing officers will be better able to address the needs of their students.

Recommendations for Future Practice, Policy, and Future Research

At the conclusion of this research, I have several recommendations for future practice, policy, and research.

Recommendations for Practice

*Recommendation 1: National Training Standards Should be Established***.**

While each university will design its conduct system around its unique expectations and values, I strongly recommend that national standards for training as a hearing officer be established. Currently, hearing officer training reviewed the basic administrative process, but not enough learning theory is being taught. I would also strongly recommend that training on how to design and execute proper educational sanctions be an important part of this work.

Recommendation 2: Hearing Officers Should Participate in Assessment.

I strongly recommend that hearing officers be more involved in assessment initiatives and provide additional feedback on their experiences. Conduct officer training should not begin at the start of employment, and then end once hearings begin. I believe that continuing professional development and workshops will continue to provide hearing officers the best steps for success in their role.

Recommendations for Policy

Recommendation 1: Professional Organizations within Student Conduct Should Begin Establishing Basic and Consistent Training Standards for All Hearing Officers.

There are many organizations within student affairs that set policy recommendations and establish best practices. I believe that professional organizations should begin reviewing the conduct experience in order to better prepare hearing officers for success within this role. The largest national organizations of student affairs staff members are the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA), and the American College Personnel Association (ACPA). There is a professional organization dedicated to the student conduct process, the Association of Student Conduct Officers. While none of these organizations is a governing body that can mandate changes in practice, they all can advocate for change in how we prepare professionals that will benefit the overall student experience.

Recommendation for Future Research

Recommendation 1: Student Perceptions of Conduct Hearings.

Now that research has been conducted on the hearing officer experience, additional research should be undertaken on student perceptions of the experience. By taking this approach, universities can see what the experience is like not only from the hearing officer perspective, but from that of the student being charged with violating community standards. This will allow colleges and universities to see how the conduct process is working from both ends of the process.

Recommendation 2: Explore Various Methods of Conduct Change.

Change to restorative justice. One of the recurring themes was a desire to engage in restorative justice practice. Conduct officers feel that restorative justice allows students to get a better sense of the harm they have caused and therefore make it up to the community. Some questionnaire participants indicated that repairing harm to their peers was a more motivational opportunity than addressing injuries to the institution itself.

Another reason restorative justice was preferred was it made the students part of the process. It allowed them to engage in the process, speak directly to others harmed, and even have a say in the sanctions they are assigned. Conduct officers believe this may be more motivating than simply meeting with a hearing officer and being assigned sanctions from a list.

Recommendation 3: Experiences Should be Studied Using Case Study.

This research was purposely conducted at universities across the country. However, it may be interesting to study the experiences of hearing officers at the same university and compare the experiences of a first-year hearing officer to those of one with more experience. By analyzing the data collected, each university may be able to assess their own process and determine if any improvements or changes are necessary. There are endless opportunities for conduct officers who want to improve the process on their campus. Conduct allows an opportunity to reach students in a way that few processes do. Reviewing conduct processes as a case study would allow for self-analysis and allow interested stakeholders to provide feedback.

Final Reflections

When I began my doctoral degree, I knew I wanted to conduct research surrounding student conduct. Having been a conduct hearing officer for over a decade at the time, I was fascinated by the meaning making by students in their conduct hearings, and how they grew from the experience. I had set the goal of speaking to students about their experiences.

However, when this proved to be more difficult than I originally imagined, I became intrigued by the preparation of hearing officers, experiences inside the hearing, and how our preparation matched the expectations of the role. I have spent the last three years developing the study, recruiting subjects, getting participants, analyzing data, and writing.

I am happy to say that this research is everything I hoped it would be. It was my desire to develop a blueprint for my profession, which I care deeply about, to improve the experiences of hearing officers, and in turn, better help our students. I believe this research has done just that. I have found areas where hearing officers believe they need more support and training, but also discovered the passion they have for the position. I have also learned what frustrates them and how they believe the causes can be fixed.

While I know I have only scratched the surface on this important topic, I know that there is more work to be done. I hope that I can continue my work, and that others will take up the challenge to continue to look for opportunities to improve conduct, and help our students learn from poor decision making.

Through this six-year journey, I have learned a lot about myself. I know that I am more passionate about work in student affairs today than six years ago. I know that I am more dedicated to helping improve the experiences of professionals, and how they can improve the services we provide students. I also know that I have exercised tenacity and patience and gained the ability to overcome obstacles. This has been a challenging journey, and, at several points, I wondered if I made the right decision in pursuing doctoral work. Some of these challenges included three senior advisors who offered differing guidance, my changing jobs, and some changes in my personal and family life. However, as I am writing this final chapter, I know this was a wise decision and that my tenacity, dedication, and passion for this work have served me well.

There is more work to be done in the area of student conduct. I know that others will come behind me, look at my work and improve upon it. I look forward to being a voice in the process of improving this important experience. I got into the field of student affairs because I know how my college journey changed me, and I wanted to help guide the journey of others. I believe my work to date, and my work in the future, will do just that.

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Appendix A
Questionnaire Questions

You are invited to participate in a research project titled **Hearing Officer as an Educator: Examining the Role of the Hearing Officer in the College Student Conduct Process**. The intent of this research study is to identify attitudes, strengths, and limitations in the field of how student hearing officers are trained in this role and how they see their role as an educator and to identify implications for training, research, and practice. Your participation will entail participating in an online questionnaire consisting of 20 questions and should take no longer than 20 minutes.

Former knowledge about the role of a hearing officer as an educator in student conduct is not necessary.

Participation is strictly voluntary. No names of the individual participants nor the names of any Universities will be used in the research results.

You are free to choose not to participate in the research and to discontinue your participation in the research at any time by quitting the survey.

No identifying details will be collected by the researchers.

Participation in this research poses minimal risk to participants. The probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort anticipated in the research are no greater in and of themselves than those ordinarily encountered in daily life. *

If any problem in connection to the research arises, you can contact the researchers:

Gregory Mantolesky by emailing: gmantole@lesley.edu

There is a Standing Committee for Human Subjects in Research at Lesley University to which complaints or problems concerning any research project may, and should, be reported if they arise. Contact the Committee Chairperson at irb@lesley.edu

Participation in this online questionnaire by clicking "next" will constitute consent.

1. Type of institution
   a. 4 year private
   b. 4-year public
   c. 2-year public
   d. 2 year private
2. Size of residential population at the institution.
   a. Less than 1,000 students
   b. 1000-3000 students
   c. 3000-5000 students
3. Education Level
   a. Bachelors
   b. Masters concentrating in higher education, student personnel, etc

    c. Masters in other concentration
4. Number of years professional (employed full time) experience
    a. 3 and less
    b. 3-5
    c. 5+
5. What types of cases do you hear most often?
    a. Alcohol Policy Violations
    b. Drug Policy Violations
    c. Other
6. If other, please elaborate.
7. Approximately, how many hours a week would you say you spend on conduct
    a. 1-3
    b. 4-6
    c. 7-10
    d. 10+
8. On what were you trained in your role as a hearing officer at your institution?
    a. The administrative process of completing a conduct case
    b. The institutional philosophy around conduct and your role in in that process
    c. Combination of both
9. Have you ever been trained on designing sanctions that will be impactful to the individual student experience?
    a. Yes
    b. No
10. If yes, please elaborate on the training you received
11. Have you received any specific training or education on moral development theory, transformative learning theory or student development theory to incorporate into conduct?
    a. Yes
    b. No
12. If yes, please describe the training you received
13. What is the basis of your conduct process?
    a. Educational
    b. Punitive
    c. Combination of both
14. When assigning sanctions, how do you decide?
    a. Assign from mandated sanctions
    b. Choose from a pre-assigned list
    c. Assign your own options
15. Does your institution do proactive educational campaigns to stop conduct violations prior do them being committed?

a. Yes
b. No

16. Do you feel the conduct process allows you to be an educator?
    a. Yes
    b. No
17. Does your institution set specific learning outcomes for its conduct process?
    a. Yes
    b. No
18. Does your conduct process informed or guided by any student development theories?
    a. Yes
    b. No
19. If yes, which theories are represented in your conduct process?
20. Do you conduct assessment or follow up meetings to determine what students took away from their experience?
    a. Yes
    b. No
21. If yes, please specify what information is assessed and how this information is collected.
22. How do you build trusting relationships with students to increase the likelihood they will be honest?
23. How do you feel the conduct process could be improved?
24. What do you think is the most impactful way to reach college students today?
25. Would you be willing to participate in a follow up interview in order to gain more in-depth understanding of your role in student conduct?
    a. Yes
    b. No
26. If yes, please provide your name, email, and a phone number below.

Appendix B

Agreement to Participate in the Questionnaire

You are invited to participate in a research project titled **Hearing Officer as an Educator: Examining the Role of the Hearing Officer in the College Student Conduct Process**. The intent of this research study is to identify attitudes, strengths, and limitations in the field of how student hearing officers are trained in this role and how they see their role as an educator and to identify implications for training, research, and practice. Your participation will entail participating in an online questionnaire consisting of 26 questions and should take no longer than 20 minutes.

Former knowledge about the role of a hearing officer as an educator in student conduct is not necessary.

Participation is strictly voluntary. No names of the individual participants nor the names of any Universities will be used in the research results.

You are free to choose not to participate in the research and to discontinue your participation in the research at any time by quitting the survey.

No identifying details will be collected by the researchers.

Participation in this research poses minimal risk to participants. The probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort anticipated in the research are no greater in and of themselves than those ordinarily encountered in daily life.

If any problem in connection to the research arises, you can contact the researchers:

Gregory Mantolesky by emailing: gmantole@lesley.edu

Appendix C

Individual Interview Questions

1. Are there any historical or cultural aspects of your institution that impact the conduct process?
2. Were there any considerations for any student development theories or learning theories incorporated into the design of your process? If so, which ones?
3. What is the desired outcome for a student who goes through the student conduct process?
4. Does your institution use standardized sanctions for alcohol and drug violations or are sanctions unique to each student?
5. How do you feel the process is designed to maximize impact for the student?
6. Has your institution done any follow-up or assessment with students to determine the effectiveness of the student conduct process on student behavior? If so, can you share some of those results with me?
7. Based on your experience, what do you believe students take away from their involvement in the student conduct process?
8. How would you describe the balance between reinforcing the institution's values and expectations and the individual development of the student and his/her values in your process?
9. How do you balance your role as an educator with executing a quick and speedy result in your conduct responsibilities?

Additional questions may be added based on survey results received.

Appendix D:
Interview Subject Informed Consent

I volunteer to participate in a research project conducted by Gregory Mantolesky from Lesley University. I understand that the project is designed to gather information about my experience as a hearing officer in student conduct process.

1. My participation in this project is voluntary. I understand that I will not be paid for my participation. I may withdraw and discontinue participation at any time without penalty.

2. I understand that most interviewees will find the discussion interesting and thought-provoking. If, however, I feel uncomfortable in any way during the interview session, I have the right to decline to answer any question or to end the interview.

3. Participation involves being interviewed by a researcher from Lesley University. The interview will last approximately 60 minutes. An audio recording of the interview and subsequent dialogue will be made.

4. I understand that the researcher will not identify me by name in any reports using information obtained from this interview, and that my confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure. I understand that records of my interview will be kept on a password protected hard-drive and destroyed after 5 years.

5. I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

For further information, please contact Gregory Mantolesky at gmantole@lesley.edu

If you have concerns about this project or feel any of the above stipulations have been violated, please contact the supervisor of this research project:

Dr. Terry Keeney
Lesley University
29 Everett Street
Cambridge, MA 02138
tkeeney@lesley.edu

There is a Standing Committee for Human Subjects in Research at Lesley University to which complaints or problems concerning any research project may, and should, be reported if they arise. Contact the Committee Chairperson at irb@lesley.edu

Signature ____
Date____________________