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Student Government: A Phenomenological Study of Student Government Leaders

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University of Central Florida

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STUDENT GOVERNMENT: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF STUDENT GOVERNMENT LEADERS

By

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in the Department of Educational Leadership & Higher Education in the College of Community Innovation and Education at the University of Central Florida Orlando, Florida

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Major Professor: Nancy Marshall
ABSTRACT

This phenomenological study investigated the transition process of student government leaders in a university setting. The study consisted of interviewing a total of 17 participants from Executive, Judicial, and Legislative branches, as well as the Election Commission. This study focused on finding the types of transitions student leaders experience while serving in student government, the meaning obtained from such transitions, and the impact succession planning and university personnel had on those transitions. Themes that emerged from the study included stress, conflict, advocacy, resiliency, and boundaries. Recommendations and future applications of the research findings were made to help guide higher education practices.

Keywords: transitions, student government, activity and service fee, student organizations, student leaders, higher education, college, university, Hispanic Serving Institution, student involvement.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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<tr>
<td>APAC</td>
<td>Asian Pacific American Coalition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A&amp;SF</td>
<td>Activity &amp; Service Fee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIPOC</td>
<td>Black and Indigenous People of Color</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HBCU</td>
<td>Historically Black Colleges and Universities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HSI</td>
<td>Hispanic Serving Institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JLC</td>
<td>Judicial Leadership Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>RSO</td>
<td>Registered Student Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SGLC</td>
<td>Student Government Leadership Council</td>
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<td>P#</td>
<td>Participant Number</td>
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Higher education administrators and state policymakers have long undertaken issues relating to student retention. The past forty years alone have demonstrated ways student involvement plays an integral role in student success in college (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). To measure university impact in meeting benchmarks of retention, states have opted to use performance funding metrics to regulate funding based on institutional performance (Kuh et al., 2005; Braxton, 2000; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Tennessee, Indiana, Arizona, Illinois, and Florida are among those that require institutions to meet pre-established indicators as a condition to receive state funding, either as a financial bonus beyond state funding or as part of the regular state funding formula.

Florida, the research focus area for this study, has followed this model since 1994, and it is the vehicle by which its twelve state universities receive funds (Dougherty & Reddy, 2013). State performance metrics in Florida include the percentage of graduates who find employment post-graduation, median wage, the graduation rate for first-time college students, retention rate, STEM (Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics) degrees, Pell Grant recipients, and two institutional choice indicators. For each of the twelve institutions, the Board of Governors selects one of the performance indicators, while the individual boards of trustees select the other (Florida Board of Governors, 2018) (See Appendix A).

Thus, to meet such metrics, colleges and universities are expected to offer support structures that stimulate student enrollment per term leading up to graduation (Kuh et al., 2005). One way to maintain and sustain students is by intentionally creating a campus culture that
provides opportunities for institutional fit through psychosocial means of support, be it via the campus community or the academic setting (Schuh et al., 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Braxton, 2000). To illustrate this further, research on psychosocial student support structures found that the degree of physical and mental energy invested in student engagement enhances students' academic experience, success, and successive enrollment (Astin, 1999). As such, institutions can use their internal assets to expand retention strategies through campus life resources that oversee student groups that include registered student organizations (RSOs), agencies, and student government (Dunkel et al., 2014).

Within these departments are campus allies that include staff, faculty, and administrators who inadvertently aid in student retention efforts by cultivating enduring relationships with their students, defining student roles, duties, and expectations, and serving as navigators to increase a student's sense of belonging to their campus community (Moxley et al., 2001). Likewise, staff who work with student leaders in areas of student life, student involvement, and student activities are also expected to function as advisors, particularly for those in student government. The role of a student government advisor is to help students navigate institutional policies, procedures, and regulations (Miles, 2011).

As such, the best way to equip staff working with this population of students is to conduct research on the population they assist. In the twelve public state institutions in Florida, student government leaders stand for the interests of over 350,000 students, with groups like the Florida Student Association (FSA) representing student interests across the state level. Nevertheless, at each campus student government senators represent the interests of the general student body population and their corresponding academic colleges (The Florida Student Association, 2019). In Florida, senators oversee the operational budget for campus departments,
student organizations, and resources. They also approve the allocation of mandatory student activity fees generated by student tuition dollars to staff salaries, agency operations, and departmental budgets. In addition, they create legislation in the form of resolutions, bills, and allocations, and although research has been conducted on student government leaders (Keppler & Robinson, 1993; Cuyjet, 1994; Kuh & Lund, 1994; Sanseviro, 2006; Miles, 2011; Smith et al., 2016), none has solely focused on student government experiences using a political framework to explore student leader transitions during college.

**Statement of the Problem**

According to a statement from the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges on *Board Responsibility for Institutional Governance* (2010), students form part of the campus constituency and “have a vital stake in the institution and the subject matter in question will determine which constituent groups have predominant or secondary interests and a voice” (p. 6). The extent of the impact each constituent voice brings to the campus community and decisions for each university board differs, but this guiding statement does recognize student concerns and opinions as playing an influential role in the overall decision-making process of universities. What is not made clear from this guiding statement is the influence student leaders have in the outcomes of university governance as members of campus decision-making committees, university boards of trustees, and institutional leadership councils. Specifically, of the literature available about student government leaders, there is no discussion about the level of empowerment (institutional influence) and effect they have as agents of public post-secondary education in Florida.
In Florida, for example, student government presidents serve as ex-officio members at their institution’s board of trustees for each year they are elected. Likewise, when it comes to public records laws, the state recognizes student government leaders as public officials within the confines of university functions. It also views student government not as a separate student-led organization but as a working entity that is part of the university structure. It does, however, hold a clause where:

There shall be no cause of action against a state university for the actions or decisions of the student government of that state university unless the action or decision is made final by the state university and constitutes a violation of state or federal law. (§ 1004.26, Fla. Stat.)

These final decisions typically fall within the purview of university officials who make final approval on budgetary decisions made by student government officials about departmental funding, as shown in the approval of activity and service fees. This signifies campus leaders (department directors, deans, faculty, upper administration, and staff) would do well to understand the level of power and influence these students have as they play a role in institutional shared governance.

Not only are student government leaders subject to public records laws and budgetary approval of up to almost $20 million dollars in activity and service fee funds (i.e., at University of Florida, University of Central Florida, and University of South Florida), they also hold voting member roles in campus-wide committees in areas such as parking and transportation, university appeals boards, president leadership councils, ethnic-based caucuses, and policy and student handbook committees, to name a few (University of Central Florida, 2020). For this reason,
recognizing and understanding student government's level of influence can help administrators navigate working with them. Sometimes campus officials may try to bypass student leaders to get access to resources or information they may need; however, in areas where these student leaders have the power and influence on monetary resources, it is best to work alongside students, rather than against them. Student governments’ role in this decision-making lies in its ability to fund events in collaboration with registered student organizations and departments, conference travel and registration, and research presentations (Carter, 2020).

To better illustrate this, a faculty member may be interested in sending more than one graduate student to a research conference to present findings and gain institutional prestige. However, given that departmental funds are limited, student government can assist in providing supplemental funds to cover expenses through student activity fees. For this reason, understanding the inner workings of senate leadership experiences may equip faculty, department heads, and administrators on how to operate within a student-led territory, a paradigm shift in academia.

Student government is a critical asset to the co-curricular experience at universities, financially sustaining programs, RSOs (Registered Student Organizations), research, programming, and resources, to name a few. For example, research shows the net effects of extracurricular involvement, particularly, how college enrollment and participation have "positive effects on institutional persistence and educational attainment" (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, p. 616). Student government plays a role in institutional retention, acting as the leading resource by which registered student organizations can flourish and function on campus. Without these extracurricular involvement opportunities, retention metrics could decrease exponentially (Miles, 2010; Braxton, 2009; Moxley et al., 2001).
In states like Florida, retention metrics of student persistence and graduation are two of the ten pre-established metrics chosen by the state as a condition to receive performance-based funding (Florida Board of Governors, 2018). Furthermore, while retention is undoubtedly an issue in higher education, supportive practices exist that make these efforts sustainable. These include supplying multiple forms of emotional, informational, instrumental, material, and identity support structures. Institutions can help to overcome institutional barriers by offering psychosocial interventions and resources that provide student-centered approaches that value student support groups and network connections amongst peers. No better formal and informal assets exist than in student interest groups and student government:

Student government is a critical asset to any retention effort, particularly if the structure of student government and the groups and associations it encourages reflects the diversity of the student body...These groups can link with more mainstream interest groups that foster the technical, cultural, and social life of the institution, and that helps students connect their substantive career interests to the institution's support systems. (Moxley et al., 2001, pp. 69-70)

Consequently, although there is research on the benefits of student involvement, little to no research focuses on the student government experience (Rucks, 2018). Of the studies that do, the research was conducted close to three decades ago, with no focus on leadership practices from members of the legislative branch, Judicial branch, or Election Commission (Kuh & Lund, 1994; Coté, 1995; Miles et al., 2011). As such, this study will seek to describe transitional changes of student government leaders in Florida's State University System.
Significance of the Study

This study's significance is essential for campus administrators and staff, as it provides useful information and theoretical insight on how to support forms of student governance in college and university campuses. This study will also add to the lack of literature regarding student government leaders. College administrators, in turn, can use this information to navigate the needs of student leaders and create intentional environments that foster the student voice on campus. Since the responsibility for engagement not only falls with the students (the learners), faculty (the instructors), institutions, and state governments, it is important to understand the implications active student participation in university governance has on student transitions during college (Kahu, 2013). Colleges and universities are therefore responsible for fostering spaces where student's mental and physical energy are devoted to the full academic experience, inclusive of different forms of involvement opportunities and retention (Astin, 1999).

Among the many support structures in academia, those that further enhance the student involvement experience include advisors for student groups. Advisors’ roles include faculty, upper administration, and staff personnel, who, in addition to their assigned duties, take on the responsibility of helping student leaders. More specifically, advisors function as institutional assets by helping keep student leaders accountable to their roles and aiding them through the developmental process as they continue to transition in the collegiate setting (Dunkel & Schuh, 2010). Advisors mentor, supervise, and teach student leaders in student-run organizations how to navigate university functions, helping personalize the student experience in their campus community (Moxley et al., 2001, p. 101). As such, understanding the student leader experience for student government officials can further aid higher education practitioners, staff, and
policymakers on how to expect student needs, ease access to resources, and contribute to institutional metrics of student persistence (Moxley et al., 2001).

**Definition of Terms**

The following terms are used in this study:

1) **4S System**

Part of Schlossberg's transition model. These factors influence transitions and include Situation, Self, Support, and Strategies (Anderson et al., 2012).

2) **Advisor**

These are faculty and staff personnel that support student leaders and help them navigate campus policies and procedures.

3) **Activity & Service Fee**

"A fee paid by all students within this system as a portion of their tuition" (UCF Student Government Association, 2019, p. 1). They are also referred to in this document as Mandatory Student Fees or Student Activity Fees.

4) **Psychosocial Theory**

In the context of development, how people manage and face life issues, how they view themselves, their interactions with those around them, and what they choose to do with their lives. Psychological and biological changes occur as individuals interact with environmental factors (expectations, roles, and norms) (Evans et al., 2010).

5) **Registered Student Organization (RSO)**
A Registered Student Organization is officially recognized at its respective institution after approval by the Office of Student Involvement (The University of Central Florida, 2020)

6) Senator

A student senator shall “Be responsible to the Student Body...representing the Student Body's best interests when allocating funds and approving budgets; Be responsible for the consideration of all fiscal legislation, unless otherwise prevented by Student Body Statutes; thoroughly investigate all reported irregularities of the expenditures of monies budgeted, allocated, and/or transferred through any Student Government body” elected by college (UCF Student Government, 2019b, p. 1).

7) Student Governance

Student participation in university governance. This includes committees, boards, governing bodies, class assemblies, and senate (Ratsoy & Bing, 1999).

8) Student Government

“(1) ...The University board of trustees may establish a student government on any branch campus or center. Each student government is a part of the university at which it is established. (2) Each student government shall be organized and maintained by students and shall be composed of at least a student body president, a student legislative body, and a student judiciary. The student body president and the student legislative body shall be elected by the student body” (FLA. STAT. § 1004.26(1)(2), 2018).

9) Student Government Body

"All groups, committees, offices, agencies, and branches contained or operating within a particular entity of Student Government" (UCF Student Government Association, 2019b).
10) Transition

How students "respond, cope, and adapt to the changes of life" (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 3).

Purpose of the Study

The study will focus on student government leaders and how transitions during college influence their leadership experiences. The purpose is to identify the types of transitions evident in student leader narratives using Schlossberg's transition model (Evans et al., 2010; Anderson et al., 2012), while using Bolman and Deals' political framework to guide interpretation of data (Bolman & Deal, 2013).

Theoretical Framework

Central to this study is the meaning student government leaders attribute to their leadership experiences on campus. This phenomenological study will explore the meaning student government leaders form from their former roles leading up to their current role in student government. Their meaning will be derived using Nancy K. Schlossberg's transition models (1981 and 1984) to explain student government experiences. Schlossberg's theory defines transitions, the processes involved in those transitions, and factors that affect them. Transitions include events or non-events—resulting in habits, changes, roles, presuppositions, and relationships. For example, event transitions include those that are anticipated and those that are unanticipated.

Meanwhile, non-events may be personal, resultant (causal), delayed, and ripple (effects caused by someone else). Context defines the setting where the transition occurred, while impact defines the extent by which it changes the daily living. The transition process, in turn, involves
the 4S's. These are situations, self, support, and strategies—each with its own type and categories (Evans, 2010). This research study will be the first to incorporate Schlossberg's transition theory to explain student government experiences, creating with it a new niche in higher education literature. Research has shown how there is a general lack of awareness about student government leaders among administration, faculty, and staff (Miles, 2010; Ratsoy & Bing, 1999). Therefore, equipping university personnel on how best to support student government leaders will create greater student buy-in to the institution, collaboration, and persistence.

In addition to the 4S model, a simplified model of Schlossberg’s Transition framework is reflected in Table 1 below.

Table 1 Modified Model for Human Adaptation Using Schlossberg’s 1981 Transition Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transition</th>
<th>√ Event or non-event ↓</th>
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<tr>
<td>Transition Perception</td>
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An added layer to this research study will be the use of Bolman and Deal’s political framework to describe the setting student government leaders navigate. Central to this framework is the general outlook that organizations function as a jungle with constant power struggles, competition, and politics always at play. Political organizations have different interest
groups and coalitions vying for resources that may only be obtained through bargaining and negotiation, and student government is one of these organizations (Bolman & Deal, 2013).

**Research Questions**

The intent is to conduct a phenomenological study of the transitions leading up to student’s current or past student government affiliation (using Schlossberg as a framework).

1. What meaning do student government leaders ascribe to their experiences as they transitioned to their student government role?
2. How do student interactions with university employees influence student leader transitions?
3. How does succession planning, or lack of it, affect student leader transitions into student government roles?

**Limitations**

The study has the following limitations:

1. Information is pertinent only to state universities in Florida. Therefore, results may not be generalizable to other institutions within and outside the state.
2. Factors outside of the researcher's control include self-reported information, participant attrition, change in a participant's leadership role during the study, and sample group size.

**Delimitations**

The delimitations of this study include location, population, and sample size. The location of this study is a metropolitan university in the southeast region of the State of Florida.
Consequently, this study excludes other private and public state institutions outside of Florida. The second delimitation for this study is the selection of only student government leaders as participants. Choosing only student government members leaves out other types of student leaders, including those of sports clubs, Greek life, bands, and academic clubs. Lastly, the sample size was restricted to 17 participants, reaching total sample saturation (Guest et al., 2006).

**Assumptions**

This study includes the following assumptions: (a) participant responses accurately reflect all student government experiences at the research site, (b) student government leaders offered candid responses, and (c) the data collected accurately measured student transitions.

**Organization of the Study**

This chapter has introduced the role performance funding metrics play on student engagement and retention, particularly in Florida, identifying the co-curricular dependence student government officials create as co-participants in institutional retention efforts. The next part discussed common terminology to be used throughout the remaining chapters and introduced Schlossberg's transition theory. The sections that followed included the focus of this study, the intended research questions, and the possible delimitations and limitations of this study.

This research study will have five chapters. Chapter II will supply an overview of the literature, with a synopsis of the transition model, followed by forms of student governance, student organizations' rise, and literature surrounding student government. Chapter III will
present the study's design, the rationale for the design, methods, participants, sample population, means of data collection, and analysis. Chapter IV will provide participant information, while Chapter V will discuss the study's findings and include future recommendations for research and its implications in higher education.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Student Governance: A phenomenological study of student government leaders in the Florida State University System.

Higher education research has focused on constructs like student success, student involvement, student retention, and student organizations. Nevertheless, none have explored student government influence in public state universities (Kuh et al., 2005; Astin, 1999; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Braxton, 2009; Miller & Kraus, 2004; Bray, 2006). Other research documenting the college student experience has measured student career readiness, retention, and leadership styles (Kuh, 1995; Moxley et al., 2001; Adams & Keim, 2000; Cress et al., 2001; Foubert & Grainger, 2006). However, this research study will explore student leader transitions through the lens of student government leaders in Florida's State University System.

Student involvement has often played a role in campus climate and institutional governance (Winston et al., 1997; Bray, 2006). It has also enabled students to participate in campus dialogue, exercising their first amendment right to free speech. One outlet representing the interests and the voice of the general student body is student government. The student government allocates funding for university departments, student organizations, and students through activity fees (Coté, 1995).

Of the studies focused on student government, most have researched student body president experiences but lack a comprehensive approach for all branches (Rucks, 2018; Miller & Kraus, 2004; Kuh & Lund, 1994). As such, this research study will address student involvement through the lens of student government officials—particularly those in the State University System of Florida. This chapter will briefly cover the theoretical framework, background, and research surrounding student government in five sections: (a) transition model,
(b) shared governance, (c) democratic influence, (d) student organizations, and (e) student government.

**Transition Model**

Part of the university experience involves young adults changing and adjusting to circumstances and people. Some transition from high school to college or from military life to post-secondary civilian life, while others aim to advance their credentials through graduate school and certificate programs (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). This research will study student transitions in college using Schlossberg's transition model (1981 and 1984). The transition model will be used as the main theoretical framework to guide this phenomenological study.

Schlossberg's framework has three components: transition identification and the transition process; coping mechanisms, also known as the 4S System (Situation, Self, Support, Strategies); and strengthening resources. The first part of the transition identification stage involves an anticipated event, an unanticipated event, or even a non-event. The secondary component of approaching transitions centers on the process and considers transitions over time. For example, a person may be moving into a transition, through a transition, or out of a transitional phase.

Similarly, the second part of the transition model also considers the 4S System and measures situation (trigger, timing, control, duration, concurrent stress, assessment), self (demographic and personal traits as well as psychological resources), support (types, functions, measurements), and strategies (coping responses and coping modes). The final part of this model, taking charge, involves coping interventions that help individuals manage through their transitions (Anderson et al., 2012). Accordingly, this theoretical framework was selected to describe the student government experience to consider internal and external factors influencing
transitional changes. The section that follows describes forms of shared governance present in higher education.

**Shared Governance**

The concept of shared governance has been ever-present in academia, functioning as a form of organizational behavior in the academic setting. Among its many facets, shared governance involves two or more groups, with different sets of authority, working together as part of the decision-making process. Like many organizational types, its foundation emerges from political, bureaucratic, and political frameworks. Shared governance is best evident in the struggle to form collective agreements, often restricted by institutional policies in higher education (Levin, 2000). One of the foundational texts on forms of university governance is the *Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities* jointly created by the American Association of University Professors, the American Council on Education, and the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (1990). This document describes the "inescapable interdependence among governing board, administration, faculty, students, and others," (p. 1) in fulfilling higher education tasks. These tasks are a joint effort in the academic setting that considers recommendations from faculty, an endorsement from the president when applicable, and "substantive contributions" made by "student leaders [who] are responsibly involved in the process," (p. 1). Documents such as these show the implications of shared governance in higher education and the role students play in navigating power and influence dynamics to achieve desired outcomes. The following section will discuss how governance models are present in academia by way of organizational cultures.
Organizational Cultures Present in Academia

Among the many shared governance structures, those most prevalent in higher education institutions, particularly those serving the public sector in Florida, are collegial, bureaucratic, and political. Collegial institutions are egalitarian in nature, value deliberation, expect conformity to the structure by faculty and administration, and value expert knowledge amongst colleagues. On the other hand, bureaucratic institutions run like machines through a series of trade-offs, where members follow pre-established rules, policies, and regulations. Lastly, in political cultures, there are coalitions where groups vie for power and resources through negotiation and competition (Birnbaum, 1988). Since student government leaders operate within these academic cultures, it is essential to consider their impact on student government operations. Organizational frameworks are like organizational cultures and include the structural, political, symbolic, and human resources frameworks which will be referenced in this study (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Similarities between frameworks and organizational cultures are undoubtedly evident, especially between the “structural model” and the “bureaucratic organizations”—both valuing high reliance on tasks and procedures.

Meanwhile, the symbolic framework values dialogue and ceremony, and it is the most like a collegial culture. The third corresponding framework most parallel to the political culture is none other than the political framework. An organization that operates in a political framework values competition, advocacy, and power, while contending for resources. Having a general understanding of organizational cultures and frameworks will explain colleges' inner workings in Florida, particularly, the many cultures that influence forms of university governance in college campuses. Colleges and universities function under various cultures, including but not limited to a developmental culture, managerial culture, tangible culture, advocacy culture, and virtual
culture (Bergquist & Pawlak, 2008). The section that follows will introduce governance structures (professional organizations) that support student affairs professionals and administrators helping connect students to campus resources through programming efforts.

Professional Organizations Supporting Campus Programming

Student affairs professionals and campus administrators face the challenging task of creating environments and campus programming to aid in the student co-curricular experience outside of the classroom. These programs often become the medium by which students begin their involvement experience. Accordingly, student affairs practitioners are expected to articulate learning outcomes when designing programs seeking to measure student engagement and student governance in college campuses. They do so by aligning department goals to assessment metrics, measuring program effectiveness (Bray, 2006).

Associations such as the American Student Government Association (ASGA) offer support structures for advising student governance structures. ASGA aims to serve and support student governments across the United States and prides itself on having 1,500 member institutions across 50 states (American Student Government Association, n.d.). However, with over 4,360 degree-granting institutions, 1,528 two-year colleges and 2,832 four-year colleges in the U.S., only 34% of colleges and universities participate in this knowledge community (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2019a). Of the resources available from ASGA, none explore the transitional changes of student government leaders. This research study will seek to do just that. Nevertheless, to understand student government experiences, the philosophical impact of democracy will be explored.
Democratic Influence

This next section will discuss elements that have shaped student governance in higher education, beginning with a discussion on democracy, forms of democracy, and democratic influence on education. As students began to take part in the day's global and national issues, student activism appeared on campus, known today as participatory citizenship. Namely, students began to engage in campus dialogues, advocating for the need to be a part of their institutions' decision-making process. This form of governance, or student participation, is what Klopf (1960) refers to as participatory citizenship. An extension of participatory citizenship is participatory democracy. In a participatory democracy, constituents take part in the decision-making process. A downside to participatory democracy in higher education is having too many constituent voices in the decision-making process, which can often disrupt change and delay progress (Sanseviro, 2006).

Regardless, democracy is present in student government structures through shared governance and separation of powers between three branches (Executive, Legislative, Judicial) (§ 1004.26, Fla. Stat.). As a concept, democracy started as part of the European Enlightenment era near the end of the French Revolution. It stands for a social contract between the government and the governed. Student government is the epitome of this description as its leaders function in participatory democracy, actively engaging with their constituents and having a say in the decision-making process. Despite this, participatory democracy has undoubtedly received criticism for its steady increase in voter apathy (indifferent constituency) and an uninformed electorate (diminished political literacy) (Hamblin & Korpar, 2018). The relevance of voter apathy is best evidenced by the current metrics surrounding voter engagement at the intended
research site. At the site, only 9% of the student body voted in general elections (The University of Central Florida, 2019).

Democracy in Education

The educational reformer John Dewey paved the way for the interconnection between democracy and education. With a shift from the religious to the scientific and social obligation, educational democracy put at the forefront experience, reason, and sentimentality as necessary skill sets to find the truth to solve everyday issues. It brings a learner-centered approach that works through a collective unit, beyond governmental parameters, to create change (Elias & Merriam, 2005, p. 55). This form of democracy is also known as social inquiry, forming part of an organized intelligence structure. Organized intelligence allows people with common interests to engage in the decision-making processes through debate and discussion to come to a shared decision. This form of shared governance has continued to evolve into collective intelligence. Collective intelligence is a technology-assisted decision-making process for collective groups (Peters & Jandric, 2017). In application, both organized intelligence and collective intelligence are evident in student government's everyday functions and are currently present in hybrid models of video conferencing to conduct general meetings, committees, and caucuses, to adapt to the after-effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Student Organizations

Defining Leadership

For this study, a student leader is a university student holding an appointed or elected leadership role in student government standing for the interests of their constituents. Although
there are many definitions of leadership, Northouse's (2019) seminal work on leadership has come to be one of the definitive works on this topic, listing over fifteen leadership methods. These include approaches to leadership (trait, situational, skills, and psychodynamic), theoretical frameworks (path-goal and leader-member), leadership types (transformational, authentic, servant, adaptive, and team) and ecological approaches (culture and gender). Northouse’s work analyzes over 60 years of conceptualized leadership across diverse cultures and time and offers the conclusion that leadership is simply a process where individuals try to achieve a common goal by influencing other groups of people that form part of a group (Northouse, 2019, p. 6). In this study, leadership will be viewed through the lens of student government leaders in Florida universities.

Types of Student Organizations

This section will explore the history of student organizations, which typically fall into the categories of Greek life, academic life, residential life, department affiliated, honors, military, sports, and hobby or interest based (Dunkel et al., 2014). To be fully operational organizations, student groups register to gain access to institutional prerogatives. Rights include first amendment protections, such as the ability to organize or assemble.

However, as institutions of learning, colleges and universities may regulate how student groups access such privileges on campus, creating requirements such as officially registering with the institution. Once organizations become registered student organizations, they are afforded certain concessions, among them access to venue space for meetings, the ability to hold events on campus, and the ability to request funding (Kaplin & Lee, 2009). The next section will introduce agreed-upon privileges afforded to both faculty and student leaders.
Academic Freedom and Student Organizations

The provisions of academic freedom for college campuses and universities are best exemplified by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) 1940 joint statement of principles. This statement made two distinctions. First is the professors' freedom to teach their academic discipline (Lehrfreiheit), and second is a student's freedom to learn (Lernfreiheit). This joint statement brought with it specific terms afforded to students. Among them is a student's ability to join and form student groups; the right to express opinions on campus (publicly and privately); the right to take part in institutional policy decisions that deal with student affairs; and the freedom of discussion and inquiry. This joint statement helped lay the groundwork for the student leader experiences in college campuses and universities, including freedom of speech, the right to petition, and freedom of assembly (American Association of University Professors, 1990, Kaplin, 2009). The section that follows will present early forms of student assembly and the rise of student organizations.

A Brief History of Student Organizations

Initial forms of student organizations were first seen through literary societies, followed by honor systems, assemblies, and student government structures, all functioning as an avenue for the student's voice, advocating for the students' needs, and supplying the resources necessary to provide structure and order. These early societies functioned as honor systems that evolved to judicial systems and later expanded to fraternities, athletic teams, and clubs (Sanseviro, 2006).

As more student groups began to appear, student assemblies functioned to voice student concerns (May, 2010). However, as university governance began to change, so did forms of student advocacy. As students grouped into class rank and status, class councils surfaced to
accommodate the student body's needs. Meanwhile, these gave rise to student councils with elected representatives by the turn of the nineteenth century. As these groups continued to evolve, they began to adopt functionalities like the federal government (three government branches) (Dunkel, 1998). Notwithstanding, after World War II, self-governance became the norm in higher education, giving rise to in loco parentis, as higher education institutions began to take on a parental role.

Nonetheless, this relationship changed once more with the rise of the Civil Rights era and the Supreme Court legislation that forbade discrimination based on race, gender, or disability (Lake, 2011). Such changes brought an era of access to post-secondary education for minority students, especially at predominantly white institutions (PWI). With this change, minority groups began to create organizations and unions to advocate for their students' needs. Among the first of these were the Black Student Union at the College of William and Mary (1971) and the Black Student Movement present at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill (1967) (May, 2010).

Meanwhile, Oberlin College and the University of Michigan were among the first to have elected student body representatives participate in institutional decision-making processes (Solomon, 1986). By the 1970s, public law rights allowed students to have a say in the use of their student fees. As such, elected student body representatives began to play a role in distributing student fees (May, 2010). Still, it was not until the 1960s and 1970s, an era of student activism, that students demanded control over their collegiate experience (Cuyjet, 1994).
Student Government

Early forms of Student Government

Literary societies and debate societies functioned as early forms of student government. Regardless, the first signs of student government-like groups first emerged at Amherst College with the House of Students (Keppler & Robinson, 1993). Since then, student governments have grown in their roles. Initially not holding an active role in university governance, they now help legislate mandatory student fees to university departments, registered student organizations, and campus programming agencies. For instance, in states like Florida, student body presidents are members of the board of trustees (UCF Board of Trustees, 2020; University of South Florida, 2020).

The years 1785 to 1860 were described as a "war between generations," with reported instances where students expressed dissatisfaction with faculty and course of study subjects (Thelin, 2011, p. 65). During this period, the administration often questioned student activities, spurring the creation of renegade organizations. Similarly, students began to form social organizations through "eating clubs," joining resources to hire a cook and rent out a dining room near the school. By the early nineteenth century, there was a rise in student organizations, including literary societies, secret societies, Greek-letter fraternities, debating clubs, honor, and religious groups (Thelin, 2011, p. 66). Of notable mention is The Phi Beta Kappa Society. Phi Beta Kappa was the first secret society formed by students in 1776 during civil unrest in the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia. With its founding president John Heath, the society became the first Greek-lettered organization founded in the U.S. (Current, 1990).

Falvey (1952) explains the emergence of student government in its most succinct form by categorizing the various student engagement stages. First, with the medieval university, students
hired faculty and had some say in the curriculum and the municipalities where the schooling took place. Second, when colleges were "endowed dormitories," a parental relationship existed between the faculty and students (p. 37). Third, in the era of colonial colleges in America, the church governed most colleges and served for religious purposes to train those joining the ministry. At this time, colleges saw the rise of the honor system (student self-discipline) at William and Mary and the elective system (prescribed curriculum) at the University of Virginia.

Fourth, from the 1820s to the 1890s, the doors of higher education started to open, as seen initially in Oberlin College, with its first Black student graduate (1826) and the start of coeducation (1833) (Lucas, 2016). Additionally, early forms of student governance were present in Trinity College (mock court), Amherst College (House of Students), Union College (student courts), Yale (vigilance committees), Lafayette College (defining via policy a student's duty to the institution), Maine State College (limited powers), University of Illinois (student council), and the University of California. To be sure, the 1800s engendered an era of student engagement in administration. Fifth, from 1900 to 1950, student participation increased with multiple governmental structures evident in honor systems and membership requirements for student government, including faculty veto power over councils. Though not inclusive, these were a few of the government systems at the time. Past the 1950s came the rise of community government and student-faculty cooperation, still present today.

Branches

Student government operates differently across institutions, but typically, there are three branches and an Election Commission. The primary branch is the Executive branch, led by an elected president and vice president and their appointed and elected cabinet members. Second, a
Judicial branch or council stands for student concerns across multiple university committees, such as grade appeals and parking and transportation appeals. Third, a legislative body is made up of elected student body representatives (senators), and lastly, an Election Commission oversees senate and presidential campus elections (§ 1004.26, Fla. Stat.).

Student Government Roles

Student government officials serve as elected or appointed student body representatives responsible for advocating the student body's needs to campus administrators. Three types of governance structure models define the scope and responsibilities of student governments at institutions. The first is an able student government, one that administrators only call upon to hear the student's voice. The second is a community governance structure with shared power amongst students, faculty, and staff, with privileges ranging from voting rights to ceremonial titles. The last is a combination of these two models. (Cuyjet, 1994).

Mandatory Student Fees

State universities often use mandatory student fees (activity and service fees) to fund student services and student groups via student government. Historically, student groups have refuted the use of their paid tuition dollars toward funding student organizations whose philosophy and speech they disapprove of as an infringement of their First Amendment rights. Nevertheless, the Supreme Court noted the protection of First Amendment rights is not fixed toward student groups. As such, institutions have used this rationale to assert the educational enterprise and mission of universities as an avenue that justifies using mandatory fees by student
government to allocate funding to student groups with an ideological difference and generate political resolutions (Coté, 1995, p. 826).

**Student Government in Academic Literature**

This section will briefly discuss some of the research studies already conducted on student government leaders, starting first with Keppler and Robinson's 1993 study. They conducted a survey that reviewed the impact student government had on college campuses (n=236). Out of the forty-nine areas of interest that participants could select, student government's highest impact was student life, social matters, finances, structure, representation, and relationships. Although this is still relevant, more than three decades have passed since follow-up research has been conducted (Keppler & Robinson, 1993).

In 1994, Cuyjet conducted a study with a fifty-one-item questionnaire sent to students (n=389) across different institutions to rate student governments' services at their institutions. Of the two types of participants in the study (student government members and non-members), those in the in-group (student government leaders) ranked services offered by student government higher than out-group members (non-members). Student government leaders also ranked services and willingness to tackle issues at a higher rate than non-members. Services included activity and service fees, campus committee representation, tuition fees, campus programming, and race relations. Despite this, student government leaders' highest-rated area of concern dealt with the apathy the general student body population had toward any initiatives student government leaders took on. Although this research study used metrics that may still be applicable today, three decades have passed since then.
A study by Kuh & Lund (1994) found student government leaders were more likely to report having gained significant relationships with peers, a desire to achieve greater prominence, and an increased leadership skillset. Like many studies surrounding this topic, it did not address how students experienced transitions as student government agents. In like manner, a study by Astin (1992) found student government leaders were more likely to express a greater sense of dissatisfaction with their institutions' intellectual environment. However, this research study failed to account for roles outside the Executive branch and leader transitions.

Around the same time, other researchers sought to evaluate the benefits of student government experiences using outcomes of post-secondary attendance. Notably, Kuh et al.'s 1994 study demonstrated lower levels of altruism and higher awareness of humanitarian concern for students who held a student government role. The study also found that student government leaders showed a higher degree of "practical competence" (r = .22) (skillsets requested by employers) and higher self-confidence and self-esteem when compared to non-student government leaders (Kuh & Lund, 1994, p. 7). Kuh and Lund's study did appear to be more inclusive of other student government roles. However, as a quantitative study, it did not provide a phenomenological lens, which is the current research study's intended purpose.

Miles’s study (2011) centered around student government leaders focused on the community college experience. With data collected from seven community colleges (n=67) in the Midwest to Midsouth, student participants, mostly senators, used a Likert scale metric to answer questions about their leadership transition into student government and ways to increase engagement in student government. In this study, fifty-two percent of participants reported being actively involved in other student organizations, and when it came to transitioning into their student government leadership role, most agreed with their ability to (1) balance their multiple
leadership roles, (2) dedicate time to growing as a leader, and (3) pursue personal gains as members of student government. Nevertheless, participants least likely identified with (1) application of their skillsets to the classroom setting, (2) their ability to build relationships amongst their peers, and (3) having a smooth leadership transition (lacking transitional documents from predecessors) (Miles et al., 2011). This study is essential to note since it is one of the few studies that sought to measure student leader transitions. Nevertheless, unlike this study centered on the community college experience, the current study will focus on student leaders in Florida's State University System.

In another study, McCannon and Bennett (1996) found that students chose to join student organizations for two purposes: to list it as part of their resume and to be around peers with the same type of interests. Consequently, their research recommended advisors evaluate how they promote student engagement benefits to students, highlighting students' ability to gain leadership experience and organizational skills. They also found two reasons that students are often reticent to join student organizations, regardless of the benefits: first, prior commitments or conflicting schedules; and second, lack of knowledge, more specifically, not knowing organizations exist that suit their interests (McCannon & Bennett, 1996). Unfortunately, their research purposefully excluded student government leaders, fraternity and sorority life, and honor societies, further supporting the need for research in this subject area.

The importance of environmental impact on student organizations' climate has also been a topic of interest regarding student organizations and their leaders. For instance, Winston et al. (1997) reviewed the use of Weisbord's model of organizational diagnosis using Student Organization Environment Scales (SOES). SOES measures categorical “boxes” where changes in one area impact other areas. These include (1) Purposes (goal-directed); (2) Structure
(direction and management); (3) Relationships (social cohesiveness); (4) Rewards (visibility and campus image); (5) Helpful mechanisms (leadership dynamics and accomplishments); and (6) Leadership (clear direction/accomplishing tasks/member commitment and acknowledgement).

This study also measured the relationship between student organizations and their environment through both institutional support (expert guidance, finances, mission) and external support (from the parent organization). Understanding SOES scales will enable student affairs practitioners to find a streamlined way to assess organizational health and effectiveness. It is certainly something to consider when evaluating student government groups.

This study also measured the psychosocial environments of four organizational types: sororities, service-oriented, student governance and programming, and academic. An analysis of variance was conducted with all eight organizations (n=266), showing statistical significance amongst the different measurement scales (p<.01), with sororities having a higher level of rewards, structure, and relationships, but only when compared to specific groups. Meanwhile, academic organizations received more significant institutional support than most of their counterparts.

Although this SOES tool has been available since 1997, there is currently no use of its effectiveness in measuring student government in today's environment. Furthermore, although student governance measures were part of the study, participants were members of residence life and not student government. Consequently, this study did not include the Legislative branch, Executive branch, Judicial branch, or Election Commission. Regardless, the SOES scale can serve as a teaching tool, an evaluative assessment, and an intervention approach to challenge and support advisors (faculty and student affairs practitioners) and student leaders. Apart from this study, not much research exists that measures student governance, specifically, student
government in public state universities. Consequently, this present research study seeks to fill this literary gap surrounding student government leadership roles.

In a study by Lozano (2020), results showed the impact student voice has on institutional governance functions, most notably on student trustees in elected, appointed, or non-existing roles (no student participation) when serving on university governing boards. Much like the research surrounding student government leaders, Lozano's research reinforces the dearth of literature surrounding student government leaders and their impact on institutional governance practices. Their research showed the importance of representative bureaucracy with active or passive representation as a critical element accounting for constituent interests. Nevertheless, findings showed there was no significant difference in existing mechanisms surrounding student leaders and board members and the frequency of communication between student leaders and board members. It also reinforced the lack of representative bureaucracy in student trustee board makeup. This research highlights the importance of continuing to study student trustees (student government representatives).

In another study by Miles (2011), he interviewed thirteen student government presidents to conduct a qualitative research study seeking to describe leader experiences to equip student government advisors. Themes that emerged centered on advisor relationships and influence, student learning through experience, and a desire to serve the student body. One of the outcomes of this research study was to provide tools for staff, faculty, and administrators working with this group of students. Unlike Miles's research study, the present study takes a holistic approach to student government, not only presidents.

Similarly, Bambenek and Sifton (2003) focused on student government leaders, particularly senators, and documented student government leaders' role in campus governance as
they developed comprehensive university documents to carry out the vision of their campus president. The partnership between upper administration and senators highlights the importance of student Senate's university governance impact. As the study showed, the Senate's partnership with the president and faculty led to the rehaul of the core curriculum with buy-in from the faculty Senate and a long-range planning document that centered on the mission and vision of the university community. This study shows the impact student government leaders may have on influencing policy and university governance. Unlike other research available about student government, this brief study focused on documenting the process and implications of having student government leaders participate in university governance.

The end goal of this current study is to equip the university community to develop opportunities for such participation. As Bambenek and Sifton (2003) propose, the best route to cultivate student participation in the decision-making process of university governance is to provide responsible input, inclusive communication, viewpoint-neutral public participation, relationship building with campus partners, and a global outlook to campus solutions. These implications can undoubtedly impact some of the discussions that may emerge as part of this research study. Unfortunately, like many previous research surrounding senators, student demographics and issues have changed since 2003.

In Canada, Lizzio (2009) conducted a study with twenty student leaders whose primary role was to serve as student representatives in university committees. This research is essential to include for its discussion of the role academic staff and managers play in shaping student leaders' effectiveness in their advocacy roles. Much like senators, student representatives stand for the interests of their constituencies and work within university governance. Nevertheless, as this research noted, the population was solely student leaders taking part in departmental committees.
It explored factors affecting student participation in choosing to engage in these roles. Among them were motivations, role conception, student leader efficacy, constituency relations, priorities, and developmental learning—all elements that influence student participation in university governance.

Love and Miller (2003) also studied student roles. They did so through the lens of differentiating undergraduate and graduate student experiences in self-governance structures. This study helped differentiate involvement experiences between undergraduate and graduate students. These are factors to consider since student government composition in colleges and universities is mostly made up of undergraduate students instead of graduate students. As Love and Miller's research indicates, graduate student concerns focus more on assistantships and working conditions than oversight of student activity fees. Even so, the applicability of these results may be limited, as this was a case study. In this study, participants were from only one academic discipline, limiting the generalizability of results but bringing into light differences between undergraduate and graduate students participating in university governance.

Another study by Peterson (1943) found that the "responsibility for effective student self-government ultimately rests with the administrative offices in 73% of institutions," where approximately three-fourths of administrative officers "are held responsible for the effective functioning of student government" (p. 206). Administrative officers, in turn, make up 49 percent of those functioning in an advisor role; 19 percent are faculty, and the remainder is a combination thereof. Understanding the makeup of student government support structures (advisor roles) can help define the nature of student governance functions in higher education institutions. As impressive as the findings were, much like the research related to the subject
matter, it is antiquated. Consequently, this study will add to student government leadership's narrative and equip those working with its leaders.

Student Activism and Student Government

Student activism has been present since the beginning of the colonial period, in the form of riots and rebellions as students sought to express discontent on how things were being run at their colleges (Brubacher, 1997). Since then, students have continued to gather in what can best be described as social movements, leading to stand-ins, physical arrests, and even deaths.

Starting in the 1960s, many students protested the war in Vietnam. In February of 1960, the Greensborough Four started a revolutionary civil rights movement of nonviolent protests as four Black North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University (A&T) students sat at the food counter of the F.W. Woolworth store, which barred Blacks from sitting down to order food. This simple act organically grew and prompted other young adults to join the movement in 250 cities, leading up to 400 demonstrations that same year in colleges, universities, and high schools (Wilson, 2020; Bluford Library, n.d.). In 1964, students at the University of California protested restrictions on their free speech and academic freedom. In 1968, students protested the construction of a recreation center at Columbia University due to its affiliation with Vietnam War research (Rufener, 2017).

That same year, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU), like Howard University, had student government leaders push the administration to change the academic curriculum to one that equipped students to challenge and change the culture of oppression in the U.S. rather than simply functioning in a kyriarchy, which led to multiple protests and building occupations across campus (Wade, 2021). In 1970, students at Kent State University in Ohio
gathered to protest the Cambodia draft imposed by President Nixon as a tactic to win the war in Vietnam. These protests resulted in the death of four students and nine injured, as 28 guardsmen from the National Guard opened fire on a student crowd (Rufener, 2017).

Then in 2013, students at New York University protested rising student debt, and the following year a sexual assault victim at Colombia University sparked a national debate about sexual assault awareness; similar campus protests arose across the U.S. (Nathanson, 2014). In 2015, students rallied together to protest the construction of the Keystone XL pipeline, as they marched up to the White House, and the following year the pipeline’s expansion was blocked by the Obama Administration. Also, in 2015, students at Claremont McKenna College protested the insensitivity toward diverse students by the Assistant Vice President and Dean of Students, Mary Spellman, resulting in Spellman’s resignation. That same year, students at the University of Missouri formed protests and boycotts to address the school’s lack of action toward racism occurring on campus, removal of graduate health insurance, and dissatisfaction with administration addressing these issues, resulting in the resignation of both the Chancellor and President of the institution (Ford, 2015; Rufener, 2017).

At the same time in the State of Florida, student activism has been evident as students have rallied together to protest campus leadership. At Florida Atlantic University, students protested University President Mary Jane Saunders for approving a stadium-naming agreement from an enterprise that manages private prisons and mental health facilities (GEO Group), clipping a student protestor with their personal vehicle, along with not addressing controversial issues with tenured professors at the school. These protests culminated in Saunders's resignation as President (Mayo, 2013).
At Florida State University, students rallied against a Trustee member for being actively involved in supporting a presidential campaign at the time (Lys, 2016). More recently, at the University of Central Florida, students petitioned the resignation of Professor Charles Negy for their “racist, sexist and transphobic” posts and perpetuation of a “‘hostile’ classroom environment” for which they were removed after a formal investigation was conducted (Martin, 2021). Meanwhile, at University of Florida, students protested the school’s renewed contract with Aramark, a food provider that uses prison labor (Pennix, 2021).

Concurrently, other avenues students have used to formally voice student concerns and offer recommendations to university governance agents involve student government. These can be through the Legislative branch of student government, in the form of resolutions and proclamations, or through the Executive branch, in the form of student initiative funding or emergency allocations to address student needs. Resolutions are “measures expressing the sentiment of the student body,” and proclamations are “measures recognizing, celebrating, or denouncing extraordinary events, organizations, or individuals on behalf of all Student Government Agents.” (Senate Rules, 2021, p. 1).

It is important to note that students are pioneering these causes, and as this current study shows, student government leaders are active members of other communities on campus, advocating for student rights and interests across all spheres of university life, as one of the participants noted. This highlights that student government leaders stand in solidarity with the interests and concerns of their constituents, in the form of student protests, rallies, vigils, or other forms of activism. In essence, student government leaders operate as agents of change in campus life functions. For this reason, in the center of student advocacy efforts, there will be student government leaders present, supporting peer interests in their campus community by addressing
student concerns and developing initiatives to work alongside students, staff, administration, and faculty to enhance the student life experience.

Summary

This literature review has presented elements of shared governance structures that provide a framework for institutional practices and behaviors that are a part of organizational cultures shaping higher education. Among the structures present in academia are organizational frameworks, the academy's cultures, and governance models. The sections that followed supplied historical context to student organizations and early forms of student government, ending with literature pertinent to this topic.

This study's importance is critical for student affairs practitioners who fall within the purview of activity and service fee departments and campus administrators. As campus agents, student government leaders have been a resounding voice in higher education and mainstream culture. This phenomenological study seeks to interpret student government experiences as they transition through leadership roles and the ways in which university employees (staff, faculty, upper administration) impact their leadership transitions.

Findings from this research will help campus administrators stay informed about the conditions surrounding the campus community. Usually, student government will use advocacy committees and conduct campus climate surveys to discover the issues troubling students. These include writing resolutions, whether politically affiliated or not. Consequently, campus administrators would benefit from being aware of the current trends and types of RSO and individual funding requests going through student government. This research study will help
equip student affairs administrators to partner with student government leaders in creating intentional spaces and opportunities for the everyday student. Purposefully cultivating a campus culture nurtures a student’s sense of belonging at their institution, addresses student needs, and furthers institutional goals of retention and graduation (Moxley et al., 2001).
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This study's primary goal was to explore the research questions related to student governance in the State University System of Florida. Research questions explored (a) What meaning do student government leaders ascribe to their experiences as they transitioned to their student government role? (b) How do student interactions with university employees (faculty, staff, advisors, or administration) influence student leader transitions? (c) How does succession planning, or lack of it, affect student leader transitions into student government roles? The methodology used to test these research questions is presented in this chapter and will have the following structure: (a) selection of participants, (b) instrumentation, (c) data collection, (d) data analysis.

Research Questions

1. What meaning do student government leaders ascribe to their experiences as they transitioned to their student government role?
2. How do student interactions with university employees influence student leader transitions?
3. How does succession planning, or lack of it, affect student leader transitions into student government roles?
Rationale for Qualitative Study

Qualitative research has been selected as the main method of inquiry for this study as it enables me to capture the essence of the student government experience through narrative form. Using this approach has allowed me as the primary investigator to account for biases, give context to the dialogue, and interpret data effectively (Patton, 2002).

Rationale for Phenomenology

The study design for this research was phenomenology. Phenomenology allows the researcher to understand the lived phenomenon of student government leaders. In using interviews, documents, and observations, a phenomenological approach allows for meaningful statements from participants to depict the nature of the student government experience. Phenomenology also enables researchers to explore cognitive experiences in narrative form to describe best individuals' experiences (Chemero & Kaufer, 2015). Using the hermeneutical approach of phenomenology has enabled me as the primary researcher to effectively use narrative inquiry to interpret the lived experience of student government leaders accounting for their culture, context, and dialogue (Manen, 2011; Creswell, 2014). Phenomenology will be used in this study for its approach in accounting for interpretation of the knowledge gained through intentionality (the act of being internally conscious of self and the world), intuition (judging things as they present themselves), and epoche (refraining from judgment) (Moustakas, 1994).
Selection of Participants

The sample population for this study was student government leaders in one of the twelve public state institutions in Florida. Participants included both undergraduate and graduate students, who were actively involved in any part of student government, including Executive, Judicial, and Legislative branches. Results are expected to be generalizable to student government leaders across the state of Florida, but not the rest of the U.S. Participants were selected based on active participation in any one of four roles: (a) Executive branch, (b) Legislative branch, (c) Judicial branch, (d) Election Commission. An Excel list of student leader emails who fit these criteria was compiled from a publicly available student government website. Of the 100 student leaders listed, the participant pool was narrowed to those listed with active leadership roles in student government, which yielded a total of 52 potential participants. From that applicant pool of 52 student leaders, a total of 17 chose to participate in this study.

Study Sample

The sample of this study includes students that identify as LatinX or Hispanic, Asian or Pacific Islander, Black, White, and Multicultural. Participants were all actively serving in leadership roles within student government at the time interviews were conducted. Recruitment of participants was done via email using their listed organizational email accounts on the student government website. Participants were all enrolled in the same collegiate institution in Southeastern U.S.
Sampling Technique

A purposive criterion sampling technique was used to select participants. This allowed me as the researcher to select a specific criterion that participants had to meet prior to being invited to join the study. Participants were required to be 18 years old or older and be in an active leadership role in any of the three branches or the Election Commission. Eligible students were invited to participate through email.

Study Site

The research site is a public state university in the Southeast region of the U.S. This university is one of three Hispanic Serving Institutions in the state and has a current enrollment of over 72,000 students, offering bachelor’s, master’s, and both research and professional doctorates. The general student body profile is comprised of 43.6% White, 27.5% LatinX or Hispanic, 10.3% Black, 6.4% Asian, and 4.3% Multiracial.

Instrumentation

This research focused on conducting interviews with student government leaders using a criterion convenience sample. As part of the study, interview questions were formulated that incorporated Schlossberg’s Transition theory (Anderson et al., 2012) (see Table 2 and Table 4). Similarly, document analysis of statutes and regulations was used to further analyze interview data to provide meaning to typical order of business and language used by participants that may otherwise be unknown to the general audience. Supplemental instrumentation included the use of NVivo software to code interview transcriptions and the use of the Microsoft Office Suite, specifically Word and Excel.
Data Collection

A convenience criterion sampling technique was used to select potential participants using publicly accessible directory information on the student government website after full IRB approval. Initially the goal was to select the eight to ten participants to reach content saturation (Guest et al., 2006). Of the 52 student leaders that were reached (see Appendix C), a total of 17 chose to participate. Students were first presented with the explanation of research and survey (See Appendix E) that allowed them to self-select an interview slot using Calendly, a free scheduling service. A Zoom (web-based video platform) calendar invite was then sent to the participant using the email address provided on their form (see Appendix E).

Participants were prompted to answer nine open-ended questions modeled from Schlossberg's adult transition theory (see Table 2 and Table 4). Interviews were selected as the primary qualitative research method to encourage participant reflective process (Patton, 2002). During the Zoom interview, the live transcription feature and the recording mechanism were used to collect interview data after participant consent and re-explanation of research.
Table 2 Aligned Research and Interview Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions (RQ)</th>
<th>Interview Question (IQ)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What meaning do student government leaders ascribe to their experiences as they</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>transitioned to their student government role?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do student interactions with university employees influence student leader</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>transitions?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How does succession planning, or lack of it, affect student leader transitions into</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>student government roles?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Analysis

To ensure the trustworthiness of the data, an artifact analysis was conducted on sources listed on the student government website. These included information regarding roles, branches, committees, caucuses, and general body meetings. Other sources of data included descriptive and reflective notes from interviews, and interview transcriptions to enhance the credibility of the data collected (Creswell, 2014). Using the Zoom platform, live transcript files were edited to reflect the correct transcription of the data as there were many errors whenever the software coded the conversations via Zoom. These were then downloaded, added into word processing software, and coded in NVivo (Qualitative data analysis software).

Trustworthiness and Validity

Verification of data was accomplished through use of literature pertinent to student government, bracketing of data to reflect the lived experience of participants, use of reflective notes, and using a large sample size to achieve saturation of data. Validation of data was achieved through use of multiple data sources: online document analysis of statutes, rosters, senate rules, and constitution. Another validation strategy included using multiple perspectives to
effectively interpret the data, these included use of Schlossberg’s transition theory and Bolman and Deal’s Political Framework.

Further data validation was achieved through member checking, allowing participants to review notes and coded content to validate the primary researcher’s interpretation of data. Lastly, using triangulation by verifying interpretations with other data to test if they matched (Johnson & Christensen, 2014). It is noteworthy to mention that rather than doing document analysis first and then interview questions, interview responses are what informed what documents were used to analyze the data further.

It is also important to note that the primary researcher had previously worked with this general population of students in an administrative role five years prior, which enabled them to properly assess data, give context to the narrative, and account for potential biases that might emerge when analyzing the data. To clarify further, the researcher no longer works with this population of student leaders.

Institutional Review Board Approval and Consent

Prior to conducting the study, the primary researcher completed CITI Training and filed for IRB approval through the host university (Appendix B). Participants received notifications via email from the primary researcher who provided them with an explanation of the research and consent form (Appendix D).
Confidentiality

To maintain participant confidentiality certain responsibilities were not explicitly stated, though as agents of student government their information is readily available to the general public online. In order to provide privacy, students were assigned a number and referenced through the research document by their participant number rather than their name or formal role (P followed by a number: P#).

Data Sources

Primary data sources for this study were the 17 Zoom interviews that reflect the use of qualitative data analysis (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). Additional data were obtained from the student government website. Among the list of sources on the website, legislative documents were used to define and describe student leader duties and responsibilities. Records included the student government constitution, statutes, rosters, and senate rules. These documents allowed me as the primary researcher to clearly define roles and common terminology used by the participants in the study. It also enabled me to properly assess the content through data triangulation.

Data Collection Techniques

Reflective and descriptive notes were collected using the interview protocol (see Table 4). Interview questions were open-ended and included prompts and elicitations to control participant dependency to properly collect relevant data (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003; Patton, 2002). Zoom was used as the main platform to conduct interviews, access and edit transcription files, and view recordings and audio files separately.
Managing and Recording Data

As participants confirmed availability, numbers were assigned based on branch affiliation. Although not all participants confirmed availability at the same time, the first set of numbers were assigned to members of the Executive branch, followed by the Legislative branch, the Judicial branch, and the Election Commission (see Table 7). Video, audio, and transcript files were all stored under a password-protected user account managed by the primary investigator. This was all done after receiving IRB approval and having participants read the explanation of research and consent to participate in recorded Zoom interviews (See Appendices D and E). Additional data such as transcription files, the main coding file, and reflective notes were all stored under a password-protected computer that only the primary researcher had access to.

Implementation Procedures

After transcriptions of the recordings were completed, coding followed using Colaizzi’s seven-step method (Colaizzi, 1978), a recommended method for phenomenological studies (Sanders, 2003). Colaizzi’s phenomenological coding steps include (1) generalizations from the data, (2) extracting meaningful statements, (3) meaning aggregation, (4) clusters and themes, (5) exhaustive descriptions, (6) description of structural phenomena, and (7) participant checking (Colaizzi, 1978; Sanders, 2003). This last step of participant checking allowed the researcher to enhance trustworthiness measures in this study.

General questions and the corresponding coding categories are listed in Table 2. Meanwhile, questions related to the research study and its corresponding categories are shown in Table 3 and Table 4.
Table 3 Pre-Interview Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General Questions</th>
<th>Coding Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is your class ranking?</td>
<td>(Freshmen, Sophomore, Junior, Senior)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is your gender?</td>
<td>Male, Female, Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is your role in student government?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is your ethnicity?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4 Interview Protocol

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Framework</th>
<th>Data</th>
<th>Rationale</th>
<th>Qualitative Research Questions</th>
<th>Prompts &amp; elicitations</th>
<th>Colaizzi Coding Steps</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Anderson, M. L., Goodman, J., &amp; Schlossberg, N. K., (2012)</td>
<td>Transition types.</td>
<td>To identify transition types.</td>
<td>What transitions have you experienced as a result of your role in SG?</td>
<td>Event: Anticipated, unanticipated</td>
<td>Generalizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Transition type</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Non-event: Personal, Ripple, Resultant, delayed</td>
<td>Meaningful statements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Anderson, M. L., Goodman, J., &amp; Schlossberg, N. K., (2012)</td>
<td>Transition process.</td>
<td>To identify the transition process before, during, and after their role in SG.</td>
<td>What was the transition process like when you first started, while you've been in your role, and how do you anticipate it ending?</td>
<td>In, Through, Out</td>
<td>Generalizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Transition type</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Meaningful statements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Anderson, M. L., Goodman, J., &amp; Schlossberg, N. K., (2012)</td>
<td>Situational factors (4S).</td>
<td>To identify coping situational factors.</td>
<td>What are some situational factors that have impacted your transition into student government?</td>
<td>Trigger, Timing, Control, Role change, Duration, Previous experience, Concurrent stress, Assessment</td>
<td>Generalizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#</td>
<td>Framework</td>
<td>Data</td>
<td>Rationale</td>
<td>Qualitative Research Questions</td>
<td>Prompts &amp; elicitations</td>
<td>Colaizzi Coding Steps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Anderson, M. L., Goodman, J., &amp; Schlossberg, N. K., (2012) Non-event</td>
<td>Self-factors (4S).</td>
<td>To identify coping factors related to self.</td>
<td>What are some personal factors that you perceive have helped your transition into this role?</td>
<td>Demographics SES Gender Age Stage of life State of health Ethnicity, culture</td>
<td>Generalizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Anderson, M. L., Goodman, J., &amp; Schlossberg, N. K., (2012) Non-event</td>
<td>Support facets (4S).</td>
<td>To explore the impact of institutions and communities.</td>
<td>How have interactions with university staff influenced your role in SG?</td>
<td>Faculty Advisors Mentors Administrators</td>
<td>Generalizations Meaningful statements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#</td>
<td>Framework</td>
<td>Data</td>
<td>Rationale</td>
<td>Qualitative Research Questions</td>
<td>Prompts &amp; elicitations</td>
<td>Colaizzi Coding Steps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 7 | Anderson, M. L., Goodman, J., & Schlossberg, N. K., (2012) | Coping strategies (4S). | To explore strategy categories and coping modes. | What strategies have you employed to transition into your role? | Categories:  
- Modify situation  
- Control meaning  
- Manage stress in aftermath | Generalizations  
- Information seeking  
- Direct action  
- Inhibition of action  
- Intrapsychic behavior  
Meaningful statements |
| 8 | Anderson, M. L., Goodman, J., & Schlossberg, N. K., (2012) | Succession planning. | To explore succession planning and how that affects transitions. | How has succession planning or lack of it affected your transition into your SG role? | Generalizations  
Meaningful statements |
- Self  
- Other  
setting  
Meaningful statements  
Impact:  
- Positive  
- Negative  
Level of stress | Generalizations  
Meaningful statements |
Timeline

A timetable has been listed below listing data collection method, type strategy, and timeframe.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualitative Data Collection Method</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Timeframe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviews with student government leaders</td>
<td>Open-ended questions using prompts and elicitations.</td>
<td>Use reflective notes on site location or Zoom call during and after interviews to aid with future transcriptions of data.</td>
<td>30 minutes to an hour 2 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiate member-checking protocol</td>
<td>Send data transcription and coding via email or shared storage software.</td>
<td>Ensures reliability and validity of the data collected from student government leaders.</td>
<td>1 week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow up interviews</td>
<td>Open-ended interviews</td>
<td>Provide further clarification and detail based on data that will be collected.</td>
<td>1 week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflective journal</td>
<td>My personal journal of field notes, interview protocol analysis, prompts and elicitation for data collected.</td>
<td>Create an online form to insert data. Either as an Excel sheet or a Qualtrics link to keep questions consistent across all participants.</td>
<td>1 week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Website Analysis</td>
<td>Student government website analysis of roles</td>
<td>Enhance data collection; provide data triangulation and verification of interviewee statements.</td>
<td>1 month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Document Analysis</td>
<td>Documents obtained from the student government website to review policies and regulations from statutes, Senate rules, and constitutions.</td>
<td>Enhance data collection; provide data triangulation and verification of interviewee statements.</td>
<td>1 month</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary

This chapter has presented the qualitative approach used to conduct this research. It presented the research questions, population, and participant sampling techniques that were utilized in this study. Data collection procedures and methods were presented, as well as reliability measures. The next chapter (Chapter IV) will focus on the analysis of the data.
CHAPTER FOUR: PARTICIPANT PROFILES AND FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter provides a brief overview of participant demographics, previous involvement experience, branch affiliation, class standing, and general themes that emerged as part of their interviews. After interview transcripts were coded, they were provided to participants to assess the accuracy of the data. Assessment of the data includes personal narratives as a result of answering research questions modeled after Schlossberg’s theoretical framework. The data yielded common themes that emerged across all 17 participants. These were (1) stress, (2) conflict, (3) advocacy, (4) resiliency, and (5) boundaries. Likewise, the three main research questions of this study reflected emerging topics that will be listed under research findings in Chapter V.

To maintain participant confidentiality, participants were assigned numbers 1 through 17. However, since participants of this study were student government agents, their roles and responsibilities were publicly accessible, which is why general roles are reflected in participant profiles. Nevertheless, as roles expire after a one-year term, it will be harder to identify participants retrospectively as this information will no longer be reflected online.

Context

Although this study was conducted in Fall of 2021, it is important to note that at the time of this study the world is still responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, although it is not an emerging theme, it is something that has certainly impacted student leader role transitions.
Participant Overview and Demographics

This study was only open to members of student government who were over the age of 18 at the time of the study. After institutional IRB approval, participants were recruited by utilizing emails listed on the student government website of a public state research institution in the southeastern United States. Potential participants received an email (Appendix C) with a hyperlink to the Full Explanation of Research (Appendix D) and a link to sign up for interview slots (Appendix D). Those that completed the interview slot selection were provided a private Zoom invite to meet with the principal investigator. Only one of the potential interviewees completed the Explanation of Research and Interview slot selection but failed to make it to the scheduled interview. Participants 1 through 7 were all members of the Executive branch of student government. Participants 8 to 16 were all members of the Legislative branch, and participant 17 was a current member of the Judicial branch and a former member of the Election Commission. Out of the 10 senate seats allocated for graduate students there were 3 active senators (7 vacancies) and 2 were participants of this study.

Participant 1

Participant 1 (P1) served as a member of the communications division of the Executive branch. Main responsibilities consisted of creating digital marketing materials for all branches. Previous leadership experiences included participation in the Student Government Leadership Council (SGLC), a mentoring program for students interested in learning more about student government. Current affiliations include faith-based RSOs and a religious community. P1 is a multi-racial Asian or Pacific Islander individual in Sophomore standing. P1 emerging data
centered around role transition, conflict, support structures from community and peers, skills gained, and minority advocacy.

P1 described how their transition into student government began in trying to meet a requirement for their SLS (Student Life Skills) class for the College of Business: “You’re required to go to an RSO meeting or apply for something. So when I was looking on KnightConnect for applications, I saw SGLC and it looked like an easy application, so I applied.” She also talked about how their advisor “really did push me to join student government and he actually like the day before we did a mock interview...and then I ended up getting it.”

Another thing that P1 talked about affecting their leadership transition was having to take medical leave for a month and having to work from a hotel room because they were out of the country when the fall term started. P1 also connected how their previous experiences helping a presidential campaign, their internship at Disney, and working for a startup company enabled them to have relevant skillsets to bring into their graphic design role in student government. P1 also mentioned the importance of having peer mentors within student government: “My past mentors at student government really did help me push to get this role.”

P1 also talked about the impact their mosque had on them:

So my mosque was really supportive. I know that sounds kind of funny, but they really do push like Shins to be involved within their school communities, because you normally don’t see a lot of minorites or like people from different backgrounds join these kind of things...but our community really pushes us to like be a part of things that we truly believe in and student government, well that’s one of the things I really believe in, which is why I joined it.
Participant 2

Participant 2 (P2) is a member of the Executive branch under the Division of Communications & Outreach. Previous involvement experience includes SGLC, Housing: Resident Assistant, and First Year Experience. P2 is a Black female Senior. P2 themes that emerged included holding multiple leadership roles on campus, time management, stress, mental health, career change, and work-life balance.

P2 referred to their initial transition into student government with SGLC and spending two years away from student government but returning for their senior year. She also referred to their initial transition into their current role as:

I was kind of, had to play catch-up, and like get more knowledge about different things, just because, like everything that I knew was like pre-COVID. And like even aside from COVID, it was like way back when things were different in 2018, 2019...I think one of the things that affected my transition is that it was very hard, because I was trying to balance working at that summer camp...but then I started RA [Resident Assistant] in summer B, so it was like I cut my hours there...and so it was really important for me to kind of like the second and third week of August to like get mentally prepared for the fall semester.

When referencing situational factors that affected their transition, P2 referenced being recently diagnosed with ADHD and having to figure out how to manage their organization. Regarding personal factors, she mentioned how “like as a woman of color I hope that, like other people that look like me will see me in this position, and know that like me, they can also do things like this.” P2 also talked about how her current experience in student government has made her refocus her career track post-graduation. Rather than working in the field of secondary
education as a teacher, she may transition to doing communications for a school board or even the healthcare industry.

Participant 3

Participant 3 (P3) is a member of the Executive branch under the Division of Student Affairs and works in Sustainability efforts. Previous involvement includes participation with LGBTQ+ Services, Senate, SGLC, and Arboretum (university resource). P3 is a gender-non-conforming Black Senior and as such the personal pronoun they will be used for the remainder of P3’s participant profile. P3 emerging themes included minority advocacy, conflict, neurodiversity, and active participation in multiple campus roles.

Reflecting on their initial transition into student government, P3 stated that “someone recommended that I joined Senate...which was good because I was like I want to work in law.” Afterwards P3 transitioned into the Executive branch and mentioned how being neuro-divergent really affected their experience:

Because some people will like, I love all of my fellow student government leads, but some of them, they don’t really like always understand why certain things are so hard for me to do. Like it’s like “Oh, can you do this now”? And it’s like “Oh I am really focused on this task now. I cannot, if I stop focusing on this now, I'm not going to get anything else done.

P3 reflected on the impact of being a member of the queer community and a person of color on their student government role:

I feel like when you are queer and then a person of color working in student government and a lot of your coworkers are like either not people of color and they don’t have the
same struggles as you, it definitely makes the office setting a little difficult, because they
don’t understand why you get angry about certain things. Or why certain things like rub
you the wrong way. It just kind of makes like this awkward tension.

P3 also mentioned that having studied in predominantly white schools where "there’s no
one that looks like me” and then transitioning into this university, which has a high degree of
minority representation, was a big culture shock for them. They also talked about mental health
and learning how to communicate better when they were feeling stressed around their peers and
loved ones. They also discussed how after taking on this role they decided they want to “wait
another year before I go into law school just to take care of myself.”

Participant 4

Participant 4 (P4) is a member of the Executive branch under the Division of Student
Affairs with a focus on transportation. Previous involvement includes SGLC, Housing: Resident
Assistant, and Senate, having held roles of Chair for a fiscal and an internal committee within
Senate. P4 is a White male Sophomore. P4 emerging themes included multiple role changes,
conflict, stress, mentorship program affiliation, determination, and resiliency.

P4 explained how every two months he had a role change within student government.
Starting first with SGLC, they found out about opportunities within the Legislative branch and
were elected to a vacant seat within their college. P4 described how he then transitioned into a
formal leadership role within Senate when they were selected as Chair for one of the fiscal
committees during the 52nd Senate session. Once that session ended, he ran and got elected to the
53rd session where they were selected as Chair for one of the internal committees that oversee
Senate operations. After serving the rest of their term within Senate, he was interviewed and was
confirmed into an Executive cabinet position. P4 explained how most of these transitions were spontaneous:

Very spur of a moment, just did the application right then and there, set it up, and went, had the interview, and was fortunate enough to be appointed from there. So it worked out really well. Same thing happened with Exec.

For the Executive branch he described the transition similarly:

I just kind of happened to be kind of noodling around with the idea of well what would it look like to be in Exec.? What could I do there that would be valuable to the university and me?...and then I kind of just threw my name in the hat again and once again, went through the interview. Went through the process and was fortunate enough to land where I didn’t expect to be.

P4 described their transitions as “unanticipated for sure, even though they did require me to do work. Whereas things like SGLC [and] JLC were all anticipated, I planned those.”

Participant 5

Participant 5 (P5) is a member of the Executive branch under the Division of Communications & Outreach. P5’s concurrent roles include Vice President of a marching band and marketing coordinator in an A&SF programming Agency. P5 is a White male Junior. P5 emerging themes included active campus involvement (holding multiple roles), stress management, and work-life balance.

P5 discussed how he had to learn how to navigate this new “emotional space” that was “equally exciting but also like daunting.” Especially feeling like a “fish out of water,” but learning through their leadership roles how to “make sure that I separate you know student...
government from my other positions and just my personal life” and to make sure not to be “overworking myself or exhausting myself.” He also reflected on how this leadership role has allowed them to develop a “higher emotional threshold,” to “navigate conflicts better...to schedule my time better. I learned how to actually communicate with people who are professionals, or you know people that are above me.” P5 also mentioned how they foresee their leadership transition ending in student government stating that they “don’t anticipate ...doing another year in student government...I don’t think I have the emotional capacity to do that.”

Participant 6

Participant 6 (P6) is a member of the Executive branch and serves under the Division of Communications & Outreach. Former roles include participation in SGLC. P6 is a White female Junior. P6 emerging themes include communication, conflict management, collaboration, and mentee role. P6 discussed how she transitioned from SGLC and was selected to be part of the communications division of student government. As part of their role, she reflected on how one of the highest stressors of their position was working with people and as a result being intentional about being “personable and approachable” and having “a lot of determination and perseverance” to succeed in their role. She also talked about being adaptable as a mechanism to handle unexpected conflicts. P6 also mentioned the importance of partnering with the lead social media communications department at the university, which helped them to achieve “recognition and almost validation by the University.” When reflecting on their leadership transitions, P6 talked about the importance of having a peer mentor in SGLC and having support from their sorority sisters and family.
Participant 7

Participant 7 (P7) is a member of the Executive branch under the Division of Student Affairs with a focus on Diversity and Inclusion. P7’s former roles include serving as president of the Asian Pacific American Coalition (APAC) RSO. P7 is an Asian American or Pacific Islander female Senior. P7 emerging themes include advocacy for minority populations, purpose, and open-mindedness. P7 described transitioning into student government after having served as the president of APAC the year prior. As part of their transition into this new Executive role, she expressed having to figure out the landscape:

I didn’t immediately know what my tasks would be, but I had a couple of ideas coming into it myself, but I found the projects that I wanted to accomplish or the initiatives that I wanted to fulfill within my team.

She also expressed the “mental shift” they had to undertake when working in student government, especially when it came to finding out their peers did not have the same kind of experiences they had as members of the Asian community. She also discussed having to navigate feeling “a little bit lost, a little bit confused” when initially transitioning into their leadership role. As a result, they expressed becoming more “grounded” and “tactical” in performing their duties. When reflecting on future gains from their current position, they aspired to be “more receptive to the people’s movement,” “confident,” and “resilient.” As part of their leadership transition, she expressed having to manage the stress of interacting with people that were not as receptive to their ideas or conversations and consequently having to “learn how to adapt to these people.” She also acknowledged having overestimated their readiness to transition into student government but having support from departments like Social Justice and Advocacy: “I find a lot of support actually from faculty themselves. So faculty who study areas related to my
P7 discussed being intentional in distancing themselves from student government as a means to have work-life balance, but she also talked about the impact of having their predecessor still hold an active leadership role within the Executive branch:

I have to feel like, Oh, maybe I'm not living up to what their expectations were, but that’s also like one of the strategies that I have to understand. Like my position is my position and I came into it because they elected me. So, the pressure is there because my predecessor is still active, but I had a good transition and I felt like I knew…to an extent what sort of challenges I would be facing.

Participant 8

Participant 8 (P8) is a member of the Legislative branch who serves as a Legislative Assistant in the Senate. P8 was a former member of SGLC and is a LatinX or Hispanic female Junior. P8 is also a senator in the Nicholson School of Communication and Media. P8’s emerging themes included mentorship, minority advocacy, conflict management, and adaptability. P8 described their transition into student government as “life changing,” helping them become “a lot more flexible”: “this role has taught me to like stand by my opinions” and “[become] more understanding but also more empowered.” They also reflected how their previous role as a member of SGLC has equipped them to effectively lead 60 new student government mentees.

P8 also tied in some personal factors that helped them transition effectively into their role, including living in a single parent household and having held the role of second parent to
their sibling. She credited these factors with helping them develop the necessary skillset to support their team and perform their duties. She also mentioned the importance of having been born in another country and how this experience has enabled them to “connect and relate with other Hispanics in the SGLC program,” demonstrating how “you know Hispanic women can lead.” P8 also mentioned how she needs to “manage their time a little better” and find a “balance between student government, and school, and sorority.” Upon reflecting on their leadership transition, she mentioned how initially they wanted to transfer out of this university, but now “there’s no school on planet Earth I would ever transfer to, like I love it here.” She also mentioned how ever since transitioning into their role they have “become more confident in myself and public speaking.”

Participant 9

Participant 9 (P9) is a member of the Legislative Branch and serves as a Vice Chair of an internal Senate committee. P9’s concurrent role is serving as programming director in an A&SF programing agency. P9 is a White male Sophomore and a senator in the College of Business Administration. P9 emerging themes included active campus involvement, role changes, and resilience.

P9 described their transition into student government starting after intentionally reaching out to the former speaker at the time, who recommended they join the SGLC mentorship program. In joining the program, he did not “bond very well with the other SGLCer’s,” but they “clicked really well with people that were currently in student government [Senate].” As a result, they ran for the 53rd Senate session and were able to transition into Senate. P9 also recounted how forming connections and bonds with senators helped them transition into Senate.
Once in Senate they successfully ran for Vice Chair of an internal committee. However, in running for a higher position within Senate, he did not garner enough votes to get elected. Nevertheless, he displayed resilience when he talked about still intending to run for that leadership role within Senate “because I feel like that fits me and there’s where I want to be.” P9 also discussed being “optimistic and [having] and open mind, not being upset when things don’t go exactly as planned.” He also discussed how interacting with people who had similar roles and similar experiences helped them transition effectively as they learned how to navigate student government. Likewise, he mentioned relying on staff and advisors as another support system. P8 also mentioned struggling with time management, particularly balancing extracurricular activities and academics. P8 also reflected on the impact student government had on them and found that they have become more “professional” and are still in the process of learning how to manage stress.

Participant 10

Participant 10 (P10) is a member of the Legislative Branch and serves as a Deputy Pro Tempore. P10 is also a white female graduate student pursuing a PhD. P10 serves as a senator for the College of Graduate Studies. P10 emerging themes included patience, work-life balance, time management, and age.

P10 discussed how being a married, 28-year-old PhD student has affected their interactions with senators. She specifically talked about age being a factor and “recognizing how much more of like a growth period they [senators] are in...that I need to make room for them to develop on their own as well, and so I've tried to be a little bit more like hands off.” She also mentioned they decided to go into Senate to get experience in policy, since that is something she
wanted to do post-graduation. Reflecting on their role transition she “noticed I've developed a lot more patience...and compromise...just like recognize I'm gonna have to meet people where they are at.”

P10 also expected to have to “tolerate” being in Senate, but she found she “became so passionate about helping the organization grow and become better and making sure everybody was performing their best.” Consequently, due to her participation in the 52nd Senate session she ran for the 53rd Senate session and plans to “make a graceful exit” after the term ends. Regarding the topic of age, she mentioned:

I don’t know if age is a situational factor, but like having more life experience, not incredibly much, but a little bit more than a lot of other people in student government has been very useful for me. Because sometimes I don’t get quite as caught up in things as they do, because I'm like, it’s you know, not that big a deal about whatever happened.

When she discussed social support structures that helped them transition into her role, she mentioned relying on feedback from her mom who works as a university administrator and running ideas through them. She also stated relying on her husband and seeking input from her lab mates to “make sure I'm doing a better job representing students.” However, she also expressed how faculty in their program had a hard time understanding their involvement in student government. In terms of strategies, P10 mentioned being intentional about what tasks they do take on and not being very willing to take on other tasks and “letting people know that, like alright, I recognize that this is something you need me to help you with, but it’s not going to happen for like several days, because other things are you know more important.”
Participant 11

Participant 11 (P11) is a member of the Legislative Branch and serves as an internal committee Chair. P11 is a former member of APAC as well as the Judicial branch. P11 is an Asian American or Pacific Islander male Junior and is a senator in the College of Health Professions and Sciences. P11 emerging themes included lack of resources, minority advocacy, time management, and determination.

P11 described lack of transition resources when he got into their role. He also explained the unexpected level of commitment Senate entails, explaining how “overwhelming” the transition was, especially since he had no previous experience in senate and the position for committee Chair required them to allocate more time than he had envisioned, resulting in them stepping down from other roles. P11 also talked about making a lot of mistakes as a committee member or personally but being intentional about creating the necessary resources that would equip the next chair to succeed in their role once their term expires. Regarding their social support structures, he mentioned getting support from P7, another APAC member that also focuses on the same type of advocacy work in student government and their RSO, but not having that type of support from their family.

Participant 12

Participant 12 (P12) is a member of the Legislative Branch serving as Senate President. Former roles included SGLC, Vice Chair and then Chair of an internal committee, Deputy of Senate Relations, Senate President Pro Tempore, Black Caucus Vice Chair, Gospel Cultural Choir member, and LEAD Scholars Academy. P12 is a Black female Senior and a senator in the
College of Community Innovation and Education. P12 emerging themes included unexpected role changes, support from predecessors, adaptability, and minority advocacy.

P12 described how transitioning into her current leadership role requires them to be more purposeful of the types of interactions they have with peers, faculty, and staff. She attributed the ease of their leadership transition to having been a member of SGLC. She also mentioned how reaching out to former leaders for each role they had enabled them to understand and carry out her responsibilities. P12 also talked about their initial transition to college and how as a freshman she was trying to “figure out where I would find my home or my multiple homes” on campus. Along the same lines she emphasized how COVID affected leadership transitions in Senate, particularly how this affected the leadership structure: “[some] had to leave due to personal things so then it left, kind of like, gaps in leadership so that helped me see where I could be...especially since I was so new [and] joined the last week of May 2020, so right at the beginning of COVID.”

Other factors that affected P12 included sudden changes in leadership that caused them to take up the position of Senate President Pro Tempore after their mentor suddenly left. They talked about initially “doubting myself” and not being “initially prepared” to do the role, “but having her and the support of other senators encouraged me and just take the role as I can.” P12 also mentioned the importance of diversity and inclusion in their role: “that’s just something that I feel, like because of who I am, that’s always something that’s important to me. And I always try and carry that out in the different roles that I’m in.” She also referenced being intentional about setting boundaries with peers, especially regarding communication after office hours.
Participant 13

Participant 13 (P13) is a member of the Legislative Branch, serving as an internal committee Chair. Previous roles include SGLC and Vice Chair of an internal committee in Senate. P13 is a White male Sophomore and a senator in the College of Arts and Humanities. P13 emerging themes included conflict management, role transition, and work-life balance.

P13 talked about how their previous involvement in SGLC made the transition into student government much smoother. However, he also discussed how the environment is very “hectic” and “tense” with “people’s attitudes towards each other,” resulting in him setting aside time to “recharge.” P13 also talked about being the only committee Chair that came into their role after everyone else had been elected at the beginning of the session and how his transition only came about because the previous Chair left to start a new position as part of the Executive branch. This vacancy resulted in him entering the role without any training and having to "make up for old work.” P13 also talked about the difficulty in adjusting to his new role, where having just joined the committee and at the same time becoming its Chair was “a big struggle.” Personal factors that P13 attributed to their effective transition included having humility and a willingness to learn. P13 social support structures included being able to rely on the former Chair and peers in Senate as resources. When reflecting on the impact and meaning he gained from his transition into their student government role, P13 mentioned the importance of self-care and dealing with stress in a healthy manner.

Participant 14

Participant 14 (P14) is a member of the Legislative Branch, serving as Chair of an internal Senate committee. P14 is a White female graduate student and a senator in the College
of Graduate Studies. P14 emerging themes include unexpected role transition, support structures, and COVID. P14 discussed how situational factors like COVID had a large impact on their leadership transition as Chair of a committee. COVID resulted in P14’s inability to be able to accomplish many of the goals and plans they had for their committee. However, she mentioned how personal factors such as being “a very flexible person and very like go with the flow” enabled her to adapt during COVID and run all meetings via Zoom.

Regarding social support structures, she mentioned relying on fellow senators, staff, and especially their senate advisor for support in “personal things” and getting “advice and feedback” on what to do as part of their role. P14 also talked about strategies they used to be able to transition into their role and they mentioned getting “a lot better at time management” but still struggling with it, especially prioritizing academics over extracurricular involvement. Similarly, she mentioned “advocating and caring for others” in order to be effective in their role.

Reflecting on the impact transitioning to this role has had on them, she mentioned how she become more intentional about helping fellow senators step into their new roles by “giving them like little pointers” of how to accomplish tasks and role expectations.

Participant 15

Participant 15 (P15) is a member of the Legislative Branch serving as a Chair of an internal Senate committee and member of Delta Epsilon Mu. P15 former memberships include Multicultural Association of Pre-Health Students (MAPS) and the Pre-Medical American Medical Student Association (AMSA). P15 is a LatinX or Hispanic male Senior and a member of the LGBTQ+ community. P15 is also a senator in the College of Medicine. P15 emerging themes include minority advocacy, COVID, and professionalism.
P15 described how one of the biggest transitions he experienced was having to set aside time for Thursday evenings only for senate business and moving around his other work and academic responsibilities to fit this priority into their schedule. He also reflected on the emotional aspect of this transition and how he had to learn to navigate the difference of being a director of a club and differentiating that from their role as senator. He also talked about the impact student government had on learning new skillsets, particularly “professionalism” and how he could “apply that to the rest of my, quite literally, the rest of my life.” He also talked about having to learn the language and adjust to the way meetings were run using Robert’s Rules of Order. Likewise, being challenged to consider other types of perspectives and mindsets helped them learn to communicate better with their peers. P15 also reflected on the type of impact student government left on them and the legacy they would be leaving as part of their service in this organization, stating “wow I did something on campus, you know, and student government, I think, was one of the biggest things I’ve done here.”

When discussing situational factors that affected his transition into this role, he mentioned the impact COVID had on him and how:

I would have to say COVID, it really hit me hard because I realized by involvement to student government kind of dwindled during COVID. I didn’t want to go to as many meetings anymore. I didn’t really want to be as active as I was before COVID, when I was in like Summer, Fall 2020...I was not as active and came back in person just being around, surrounded by other student leaders, or just being on campus, like wow I want to do this again. I want to do a difference yet again.

When discussing personal factors that helped him transition, he mentioned how his ethnicity and his race played a role. P15 stated “[as a] Hispanic, I want to make sure that many
other voices are heard in the community...knowing that I want to be there for them as well.” One social support factor that P15 attributed to helping them in his transition was his roommate, who was also his best friend. When it came to university staff interactions, he talked about university personnel who helped him improve both his professional behavior and his advocacy for students.

As far as implementing strategies, he referred to relying on their Google calendar, being purposeful about time management, and utilizing resources like Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) to be mentally prepared to handle stressful situations. In relating succession planning, he mentioned the lack of resources when he was first appointed in the middle of the 52nd session but receiving a proper orientation once he ran for the 53rd session.

Participant 16

Participant 16 (P16) is a member of the Legislative Branch and serves as Chair of the Asian Pacific Islander American Caucus (APIA). Their former role was serving as Deputy Pro Tempore of Senate. P16 is an Asian or Pacific Islander female Junior and serves as a senator in the College of Sciences. P16 emerging themes include professionalism, a feeling of being overwhelmed, minority advocacy, and resilience.

P16 mentioned needing to learn how to communicate professionally and appropriately when she first transitioned into her role and the difficulty presented by having to find her role as a student and then navigate her way through college. Likewise, she had to learn the “culture of student government,” but in the midst of those changes she was able to “grow as a leader...and [take] charge of my initiatives.” P16 also described her initial transition to student government as a “roller coaster” since it was “overwhelming, but also in that sense very exciting” with the amount of work she “had to put in.”
P16 also talked about the importance of serving as APIA Chair and being able to advocate for issues “that plague our like minority communities.” When discussing situational factors that affected them, she talked about the impact people in this community had on her and the level of professionalism she had to acquire once she joined this group of students. One personal factor that helped her transition was her “resilience”: “I pride myself in being able to you know, I guess [being] adaptable, and also like resilient, being able to like I guess bounce back.” She specifically talked about their initial disappointment upon not being accepted to SGLC when they first applied but then getting a role within student government nonetheless after hearing from a friend that there was a vacancy in Senate, applying, and being appointed.

P16 also mentioned having an open mind and being humble as helping her be less susceptible to having “impostor syndrome.” P16 social support structures included friendships both inside and outside student government and “familial support.” P16 also reflected on how interactions with university personnel made her more professional, productive, and confident in her role. Strategies P16 utilized to transition into their role included being more “receptive” and “open minded” as well as being more intentional about “time management.” Regarding succession planning, P16 mentioned relying on a transition binder to acquire general information about their role but still needing more information since the information provided only listed “the bare minimum requirements.” P16 also reflected on the impact and meaning attained from her transition into student government, which included her participation “in something so much bigger than myself” and having the “privilege of like witnessing different perspectives.”
Participant 17

Participant 17 (P17) is a member of the Judicial branch. They currently serve as the Chief Justice, branch head. Former roles included SGLC, Justice, Interim Chief Justice, and Election Commissioner. P17 is a White female Senior. P17 emerging themes include family support, resilience, work-life balance, and holding multiple roles.

P17 mentioned that her first transition into student government started when she was selected as a member of SGLC and were able to focus on JLC, the part of the mentorship program solely focused on training mentees on Judicial branch operations. P17 discussed how she immediately applied to be an Associate Justice but “didn’t get it.” She later successfully applied for the Election Commission, where she served only the election timeframe, but then her role ended at the beginning of COVID resulting in her moving back home at the start of the pandemic. Then the following year she reapplied and was accepted for the position she had initially been rejected for and relocated back to Orlando.

P17 also discussed having to navigate “work-life balance” between her involvement and work commitments, deciding to step away from her sorority and focus on both work and student government duties. P17 also discussed how quickly she transitioned from Interim Chief Justice to Chief Justice of the Judicial Branch due to leadership vacancies. P17 also talked about “learning how to manage my time” and learning “how to deal with people.” When it came to situational factors that affected her transition, she discussed having to deal with stress and “overload[ing]” themselves during their final term prior to graduation but being intentional in training their successor. Personal factors that helped her transition into their role effectively included “removing [herself] from situations...and remain[ing] impartial.” Support structures included heavy reliance on other “branch heads” as well as family and friends. When it came to
addressing interactions with university personnel, she mentioned how interacting with staff in the field of higher education prompted her to apply to graduate school in the field of higher education, with a focus on gaining further experience in Title IX policies, rather than going to law school.

**Research Question Findings**

Colaizzi’s method was used to analyze the data. Transcripts were first sorted to find statements of interest that were generalizations of the content. Statements were then extracted based on the types of transitions students experienced. Participant statements were then aggregated to generate meanings. Afterwards, descriptive data were referenced to guide the interpretation of the transition phenomenon. Once the transition phenomenon was described, the validity of the metrics was assessed by comparing the findings to the original source content belonging to the original participant statements.

Table 6 and Table 7 provide a visual aid regarding participant involvement and demographic information.
Table 6 Participant Involvement

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Table 7 Participant Demographics

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Research Question 1

The initial research question for this study is “What meaning do student government leaders ascribe to their experiences as they transitioned to their student government role?” Interview questions that sought to answer this research question are reflected in Table 2 and Table 4. In regard to interview question number one, the types of transitions students experienced, these included expected and unexpected transitions that often came in the form of role changes (P16, P17, P4, P5, P7), getting adjusted to the level of professionalism that came with the role (P15, P16, P9), transitioning from the SGLC mentorship program (P1, P13, P17, P2, P4, P8, P9), work-life balance (P17, P15, P2, P8), and advocacy (P15, P7). Role changes included navigating a new culture, as demonstrated by P16:
First of all, my role as a student trying to figure out, like navigate my way through college, and you know figuring out if my degree is right for me and stuff like that um but also. Yeah, getting to know the culture of student government at a professional level so that's I guess a personal transitions transition, I was going through.

It also included changing leadership roles, as stated by P17:

And then I stepped away from the election commission after that semester, and then come spring 2021 I reapplied for a justice seat, I ended up getting it moved back to Orlando cuz I was home for the pandemic. And then, this past summer became the interim Chief Justice and then became the Chief Justice, and here I am now.”

Professionalism was also a common thread, best exemplified by P15’s statement:

They taught us professionalism, but I already knew, most of it, I already knew how to speak, I already knew Robert's Rules. I already knew how to send emails and really how to speak in public speak especially so those skills were already on my backpack when I joined other organizations that require professionalism.

Similarly, P16 stated:

...also like learning how to communicate like professionally and appropriately with like, all the professionals on campus because, like that really puts you in a professional sphere, like student government and it wasn't really I guess hard transitioning to that in a sense.

Participants also mentioned their role in a mentorship program and how this was a contributing factor to their transition into leadership roles within student government. For instance, P13 described it as: “so yeah in SGLC I kind of got a taste of what it would be like, but actually being in the role like I realized, how many connections, I can make on-campus or within student government.” A similar sentiment was expressed by P4:
Actually, if you want to count as SGLC our student government leadership Council I started all the way back with that last year, so that was my first taste of student government in any capacity whatsoever and I fell in love with it and then from here, I, from SGLC I went into Senate, while doing the program.

Developing a proper work-life balance was also a transition type that emerged, as reflected in P17:

On a good day to day basis transitioning between this role, and my other on-campus job, all of my classes, and an internship. Over the summer I had four jobs so like living on a calendar and just moving back and forth between one on like a smaller transition scale, but those are probably I probably the big life ones.

P15 also had to re-arrange priorities surrounding their involvement in student government:

First major one, is for sure my Thursdays, my Thursdays were definitely changed as our meetings or have always been Thursdays and they will be Thursdays, for, like the rest of student government that I know so far. So, it has made me switch my schedule around a lot, and as I realized how important it is to be a student leader here on campus, I realized the importance of coming to these meetings.

Lastly, advocacy also came up as a topic:

Seeing as that I saw the position as a way to influence, but we're all to kind of give back to the community that I served previously. And that Community as I would describe it was mostly like BIPOC [Black, Indigenous, People of Color] folks, like people who were heavily involved again with social justice and advocacy and overall kind of like were minorities in a sense (P7).
Interview question number two asked participants what the transition process was like for them. Main codes that emerged included advocating for student needs (P10, P12, P13, P16, P5, P7, P9), feeling overwhelmed (P1, P11, P13, P16, P2, P5), having peer support, (P1, P14, P17, P9), work-life balance (P17, P2, P5, P6), SGLC mentorship (See Table 6), and conflict (P1, P4, P6). One example of advocacy is reflected by P7’s statement: “...still compassionate towards like those social causes and all, but also I'm a little bit more tactical now if that makes sense.”

Meanwhile, peer support is exemplified by P1’s quote: “but when I came here, it also fostered a sense of like community like we're one team, we all have the same goals in mind, so we all are, will try and work together the best way we can.” Work-life balance and SGLC re-emerged as themes, too, in response to interview question number two (see Table 4). Concurrently, conflict was also a reoccurring topic: “We didn't want to like come off as like mean or something like that so everybody would kind of beat around the bush, which kind of doesn't help when you're doing work” (P1), and “Of course it's young people in politics and sometimes drama gets into things and that's always fun and interesting right” (P4).

Interview question number three (see Table 4) sought to focus on the situational factors that impacted transitions. Prominent topics included: COVID 19 (P12, P14, P15, P2, P4), adapting (P1, P11, P13, P4, P5, P7), health (P1, P2, P3), peer support (P1, P12, P16, P17, P9), stress (P17, P3, P4, P7), as well as the re-emergence of work-life balance (P10, P15, P17, P2) and role changes (P12, P13, P4, P9).

COVID as a situational factor may be observed in the following:

I will say when I got into Senate COVID really affected how leadership was and a lot of people. Unfortunately, had to leave due to other personal things so then it left kind of like gaps and leadership, so that also helped me see where I could be and were. And how I
could help in Senate, especially since I was so new that was something that I was kind of scared about because I had joined (P12).

Likewise:

I think COVID, COVID19 because I became chair in January, and we had elections mid-January, towards the end, and then we went away for spring break, and then we just didn't come back. And then committee had a lot of plans and everything that we, unfortunately, couldn't follow through with (P14).

Adaptability was also a topic that emerged as students tried to navigate situational factors that impacted their role: “So it was adjusting to the committee and to the chair at the same time, even though I knew what they did like I had no real experience with it was also a big struggle, I guess” (P13), and

you have to learn how to adapt to these people, and you have to really kind of like get the ball rolling right like it's not the same as it was, so I think the stress was just more of like adapting to different audiences (P7).

Health was also a re-occurring topic and is represented by several participants. For example, P1 mentioned: “So over the summer I worked virtually because I wasn't in Orlando, and then I did have to take a medical leave of absence for a month.” In like manner, P2 shared: "I would say, like the summers when I first like started actively taking my medication... I could typically like do fine, but I found that within this role, I really need it so like be focused on another level.”

Stress was also a very present category, reflected in statements like:

Yes, okay so definitely a lot of stress. I was also just telling my like fun, so I because I'm graduating in December, I have overloaded myself this semester I’m trying to finish,
strong and with a bang kind of thing so I’m currently functioning and like a not long term (P17).

Another example of stress is reflected here:

I think I think what made it more stressful was that I hadn't factored in that the people that I would be interacting with were not. Again, most immediately receptive to certain ideas or to certain conversations, so I think that was really my stress and it was like a stress I placed on myself (P7).

Interview question number four asked participants to reflect on personal factors that affected their transition process. Among the top listed were advocacy (P12, P15, P2, P4, P8, P9), compassion (P12, P17, P6, P8), confidence (P10, P6, P7, P8, P9), determination (P11, P4, P6), open-mindedness (P12, P16, P4, P9), and resilience (P6, P4).

Compassion, as a topic, can be represented in statements like “we're also diverse and we're all doing 1,000,002 things so it doesn't hurt to be more compassionate and that's just something that I personally do” (P12). Then again in “so yeah definitely that also being nice to everyone, I think it's helped me be successful in my role” (P17). Similarly, confidence is represented in statements like "I said it's, it's like a confidence that like Okay, I came to this conclusion I’m confident in that conclusion and I’m not afraid to present a conclusion to anybody, that is, in my vicinity” (P10).

Confidence and resilience may be observed in statements like “I guess just confident in being in a government agent, and also being receptive to the people's movement. So I would just describe my end game as I guess confident. Confident and resilient” (P7). Resiliency alone is also reflected in this statement:
Okay awesome I think it's a very I guess um I’ve thought about this a lot and I think one of the things that really helped with my transition is I guess my resilience I think. I pride myself in being you know I guess adaptable, and also like resilient being able to like I guess bounce back (P16).

Interview question number five focused on support structures present that assisted during the transition process. Main topics include community support (P1, P12, P15, P3, P4, P6, P9), family (P10, P16, P17, P3, P4, P5, P6), friends (P12, P15, P16, P17, P2, P4, P5, P6, P7), peers (P10, P11, P12, P13, P14, P16, P17, P5, P9), health (P2, P3, P7), and peer mentorship program (P1, P4, P6). The following is a quote displaying community support: “I also know that, like my community, so my mosque was really supportive, I know that sounds kind of funny but they really do push. Like Shins to be involved within their like school communities” (P1). Similarly, “Also I'm really close with the advising team from my student government agency, I really clicked well with them and I’m able to have bonds with them” (P9).

Family support is represented in statements like “Like my parents were so supportive of every like endeavor that I have and always excited my mom is always on Facebook posting about like oh my gosh I’m so proud of my daughter” (P16), and

I did my confirmation from home, so I was sitting in like a different room and my family was watching the live stream and, like the kitchen. And like when I had to answer things, I could hear them like yelling and like screaming at like it's hooked it up to the TV, and like they made a whole viewing party over it (P17).

Friendships are also mentioned as support structures during transitions and may be displayed in excerpts like this:
I would have to say my roommate slash best friend, they're the same person... She was she got dressed up just as much as I did, I put on my suit she put on a dress and she was there in the back seats clapping when I was interviewed, clapping when I was confirmed so she has definitely been a very big support system for me, I would have to say (P15).

The seventh interview question focused on the strategies used to transition into their student government role. Results included time management (P1, P12, P13, P15, P16, P2, P4, P5, P8, P9), work-life balance (P10, P12, P6, P7, P8, P9), health (P13, P15, P2), advocacy (P14, P17, P7), and networking (P17, P2). Examples of time management excerpts include:

“something that I mentioned earlier, was time management, but truly was something I had to learn. Student government was something that it made me buy a physical calendar” (P15), and “Time management like setting specific I guess duties within the week or even within the day um has helped a lot on with transition and has made it more approachable and easier” (P16).

An example of work-life balance as a category may be observed through this quote: “I have super super strict working hours, like, I do not do anything student government related on weekends like there, I have not encountered emergency yet worth like doing more than two texts on a weekend” (P10). Another illustration of this can be seen here:

One thing I tried to do is I try to tell people like hey if I don't respond I’ll respond, the next day or people text me then I’ll say hey I’ll, I’ll get to this in the morning. Unless it's something really urgent just because, having a clear divide between when I’ll do student government things I want to take time for homework, or just to take a break is super important (P12).

The last interview question under this section focused on finding the overall meaning gained from those transitions. Common topics that appeared included advocacy (P1, P10, P15,
P16, P5, P6, P7, P9), career path change (P17, P2, P9), conflict (P1, P12, P13, P17, P2), gaining a new skillset (P10, P11, P15, P17, P2, P4, P8, P9), stress (P13, P3, P5, P6, P9), and legacy (P15, P5, P8).

An example of advocacy is reflected in P10’s statement:

Because I have met so many people that do such great work and, like are such ardent advocates for students that like it is at this moment, starting to bring me to tears like I have just been so. Like touched by the passion.

Whereas the topic of career change can be reflected here:

...especially once I got into this role, I was like wait no, like, I want to work for a university, I want to continue. Moving forward and like an administrative role within the university and so that's like, definitely been very impactful for me. Because it kind of helped me change what I wanted to do (P17).

Conflict and stress continue to re-emerge as common topics here as well, but in regard to learning a new skillset, it can best be represented in the following quote: “Impact meaning I’ve gained from student government will be again like the skill set that I’ve gained from being a leader” (P15), as well as here:

I've learned, you know, like how to present myself well how to be more professional. How to work better with others, that people all have different mindsets and mentalities, and you have to work, you know with your own ideas but also theirs and you know kind of find the middle balance the meeting ground because not everyone thinks the same (P9).

Although the concept of legacy ties in more with succession planning (Research Question 3), elements of it were also present here in this interview response: “All the hard work that we do
is like for the students and that you know, possibly, this will help inspire a new generation to keep continuing this change” (P5).

Research Question 2

This second research question was “How do student interactions with university employees influence student leader transitions?” The interview question that focused on answering this was question number six (see Table 2). As a collective, university personnel helped students be better advocates (P10, P14, P17, P9) and professionals (P15, P4), but generally, university personnel were described as supportive (P10, P14, P17, P9, P3, P6, P8, P11, P13, P17) and functioned as a resource to students (P4, P17). Faculty were typically described as receptive (P12, P7), staff as mainly supportive (P11, P13, P7), administrators as willing to work with you (P2, P6) but not as accessible (P14, P9). Meanwhile, advisors were described as also supportive (P10, P14, P17, P9).

This research question was also a direct question asked to participants during the interview process. Below is a quote that addressed university personnel impact on student government leaders, specifically one advisor and a staff member (names have been changed for confidentiality):

Definitely like I said, both Brandon and Lex, if I have any problems, they have they always have great answers anytime I don't know where to go. They always have, you know, advice of whom I should reach out to. Whether that be a department or an individual. I definitely say like more an impact, they've been the sounds, so cliche, but they definitely do, both of them kind of make me strive to be a better Chair. Because, knowing that they both have my back when it comes to anything that I need help with. In
order to perform my best self in this role that they're always willing to help me out with that and kind of point me in the right direction, so they've definitely impacted [me] (P14). Along the same lines, an instance that reflects how university personnel affect student advocacy may be seen here:

So being comfortable being able to challenge them and talk to them, you know the big scary chief sweet and the big scary directors and everything else. But, knowing that they're human and they just want to know what we know, or what we see so that they can make better decisions. So it's made me a better advocate because I can talk to them as if they're human and not as if they're my boss's boss's boss's boss (P4).

On the other hand, examples of professionalism gained from faculty, staff, and administrator interactions is reflected in P15’s statement:

They have definitely influenced me by just how professional they are like even more influenced me by taking account how they speak or how they present themselves and bring back to student government. Because when I first joined I realized: Oh, you know, like we're so kids like will people take us seriously, but when I had these interactions with professionals and faculty they do at times. There's times where they don't, but like as most of the time they do. Especially how you act with that I realized that I have to gather their skills, or like see how they present themselves or how they speak and try to mimic that as well, and ultimately it's going to benefit me in the end, as well. Not only in our relationship, but myself as a person, because. I’m also trying to be a professional in the future so just like gathering these skills is something crucial for me, and I want to implement that as well in student government. Again, going back to how I present myself meetings how meetings are ran and how I advocate for other students as well.
Regarding using university personnel as a resource, it typically came in the form of finding out information about the institution or how to perform general office tasks. One example is portrayed here:

Not knowing how important he was is like a cultural piece to the university just knowing that he was the Director ... and that sounded cool and important, and I was kind of curious what the Student Union was because I thought it was just like a building (P4).

An example of how faculty and administrators are receptive is best presented by P12’s description displayed below:

I think it depends on the Faculty that I’m talking to and how I end the topic and subject area that just because there are some faculty that are really open and receptive... And I see this a lot with Dean meetings, some people are really willing to listen to concerns or students and senators and suggestions and that really helps.... I don't think you could do your job as a faculty or administrator well if you're not receptive to students, especially because they're taking these classes, they're the ones getting these degrees.

An example of how sometimes administration or faculty may not be as readily accessible is best described by P14: “You know Dean meetings are once a semester, and most of the time it's always someone different.”

Research Question 3

This third question for this study was “How does succession planning, or lack of it, affect student leader transitions into student government roles?” The interview question that sought to answer this was question number eight (see Table 2). The main topics that came about from interviews were student ingenuity (P10, P12, P2, P5), dealing with lack of information (P11,
P12, P14, P15, P17, P3, P4, P5, P8, P9), using people as resources (P10, 12, P14, P16, P17, P2, P3, P4, P7, P9), leaving behind resources for successors (P1, P11, P12, P13, P17, P2, P3, P4, P6, P7), working under a restructured division (P1, P5), using policies as a guide of operations (P12, P14, P16), and utilizing transferable skillsets in their new role to transition effectively (P12, P14).

Student ingenuity as a category is best reflected in P5’s description of how succession planning affected their role:

...meet with like administrators and students at these regional campuses and you know the student groups I'm supposed to be representing. As well as just kind of using my own best judgment and then kind of forming what the position would be as a result of that. um and so sometimes that makes me feel like I'm not necessarily doing the best in my role it makes me feel like I, you know, I have doubts about my role. um but then I realized that I'm practically crafting this role, from the ground up. I guess you could say, and that there's no like free you know there's no blueprint for my position or at least no immediate blueprint I kinda have to go off you know what I've seen and kind of like my experiences and kind of craft the position as I see fit.

Student leaders’ transitioning into their role and the lack of information regarding responsibilities and expectations may be reflected in statements like this:

And she was very supportive throughout the entire time she didn't set up. Any kind of transition binder or documents to kind of help me when I got into this role, so the first like this whole summer I was constantly like at least once a week sending her a text being like hey like how do I do this, what is going on next like how do I, what is the email password for this like what is going on here and that and this and the other thing. So there
really was no planning, she said she was gonna put something together, and then it didn't (P17).

On the other hand, there were also scenarios where due to lack of resources or good predecessor planning, students were provided with what they referred to as transition binders:

He left a transition binder which I say is like my Bible. Because it has, like everything I need like any any of the resources that he used, which obviously he was really good at his job and he also knew a lot of the stuff to work with (P1).

A similar sentiment is described below:

In the future I would [be] making sure my next person in line to get transition binders because I don't have one is very difficult, but also in those situations. From what I see, is what the committee or person mostly learns from their mistakes. During this session there's a lot of mistakes we make as [a] committee or myself individually, so I do want to record that and to pass it down, we can learn a lot more from mistakes than from what was successfully done (P11).

Lastly, others mentioned using institutional policies (statutes) as a guide for procedural behavior in order to compensate for lack of resources:

I feel like for most of my roles that I’ve been in I haven't had a succession plan or even like a concrete how to do your role basically a lot of times when you get leadership roles. People always say look to statutes, to see what you have to do and statutes is either really vague or really specific. And even then you'll still need you'll still have questions or certain things that you need further clarification on (P12).
Summary

This chapter has presented topics and themes that arose as student government leaders contemplated their transition into their current role in student government or former roles within the same organization. Although there were many different layers to each of the responses, the general themes that emerged focused on implementing the necessary strategies to be successful. These different categories can best be summed up in the following themes: (1) stress, (2) conflict, (3) advocacy, (4) resiliency, and (5) boundaries, which will be discussed further in Chapter V.
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND
RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The main objective of this study was to describe the transitions that student government leaders undergo as they move through their leadership roles in student government, a research topic seldom found in higher education literature. As part of this study, members from all branches of student government, including the Election Commission, were asked to participate in Zoom interviews. A total of 17 students in leadership roles within each branch area consented to take part in this study. Themes generated as part of this study were (1) stress, (2) conflict, (3) advocacy, (4) resiliency, and (5) boundaries. The conceptual framework used to develop research questions was Schlossberg’s transition model.

The guiding research questions were:

1. What meaning do student government leaders ascribe to their experiences as they transitioned to their student government role?

2. How do student interactions with university employees influence student leader transitions?

3. How does succession planning, or lack of it, affect student leader transitions into student government roles?

Discussion of Findings

This study focused on student government leaders and transitions they experienced as a result of their student government role. Along with the types of transitions experienced,
succession planning and the impact interactions with university staff have on student leader transitions was also explored. Participant narratives were reviewed for accuracy by presenting coded transcripts to participants, in line with Colaizzi’s method for reviewing phenomenological studies (Colaizzi, 1978; Sanders, 2003). The findings of this research help add to the narrative of student involvement experiences in university campuses across the U.S. For instance, unlike previous research conducted during the early 1990s and mid-2000s as reflected in Chapter II, this research presents a relevant and timely representation of the student government leader experience in higher education today.

For example, this study differs from most of the research surrounding this population of students in the past in that half of the participants were part of a minority population (12% LatinX or Hispanic, 24% Asian or Pacific Islander, 18% Black, and 47% White). Likewise, most participants were female (59%, 35% Male, 6% gender non-conforming) and a representation of graduate student involvement was evident (12% Graduate students, 88% Undergraduates), a population seldom reflected. This study also revealed the impact mentorship programs have on student success within student government, as close to half of the participants expressed having been part of the student government mentorship program at some point during their student government experience (41% were former SGLC members).

Consequently, as former research on the subject is either more than ten years old or fails to represent all areas of student government experiences, this study is relevant and pertinent to this new decade. For instance, past research studies mostly had participation from the Executive branch (Kuh & Lund, 1994), had a quantitative focus (Cuyjet, 1994), only studied community college leaders (Miles et al., 2011), or only focused on the Legislative branch (Bambenek and Sifton, 2003). As a result, this research study reflects more accurate and relevant data. In this
study, the Executive branch represents 41% of participants, Legislative 59%, and Judicial plus Election Commission 6% (P17 represents both Elections and Judicial). Participants in this study also reflect other areas of campus life: 29% of participants were working in other campus roles (Agencies or Departments) and 41% had other leadership roles in Registered Student Organizations.

Research Question 1

What meaning do student government leaders ascribe to their experiences as they transitioned to their student government role?

As demonstrated in Table 2 and Chapter IV, this research question consisted of a series of interview questions modeled after Schlossberg’s transition theory (Anderson et al., 2012) that sought to find the types of transitions student government leaders underwent. These considered transition types (events or non-events), the meaning formed from those transitions (self, setting, levels of stress), the transition process, and coping factors present (4S: situation, self, support, and strategies) (Goodman et al, 2006).

Results found that students experienced both events and non-events whenever they either got into a student government role (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P10, P11, P12, P13, P14, P15, P16) or failed to get a role (P9, P17). This was typically their first transition or lack of transition into student government. Students then formed meanings from these experiences based on the context (a new culture for each separate branch division). These experiences added levels of stress to acclimate, perform duties, and define a healthy life balance.
All the while, students navigated transitions using coping factors and abilities that included situations (COVID19, adapting to role expectations, health, peer support, role change, stress, and work-life balance), personal factors (advocacy, compassion, confidence, determination, open-mindedness, resilience), support structures (community, family, friends, peers, health, mentorship), and strategies (time management, work-life balance, health, advocacy, networking).

Considering all factors present in these transitions, themes that emerged centered around stress, evidenced in several narratives as a recurring topic (interview questions 1, 3, 6, 8, 9). A second theme that was frequently referenced was conflict; participants mentioned conflict or ways of having to navigate conflict with peers, communities, or support structures in response to multiple interview questions (2, 3, 4, 7, 9). A third theme that appeared throughout participant narratives was advocacy, mentioned across most interview responses, too (interview questions 2, 3, 4, 7, 9). A fourth theme that appeared was resiliency, which is also comprised of determination, purpose, adaptability, and self-motivation (interview questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 9). Lastly, the theme of boundaries was also a common occurrence, and it incorporates time management and time management tools, health, work-life balance, and stress management strategies (interview questions 2, 3, 4, 7, 9).

Altogether, transitions may be stressful with conflicts along the way, but with resilience and a healthy set of boundaries, students can navigate student government roles and successfully advocate for constituent needs.
Research Question 2

How do student interactions with university employees influence student leader transitions?

The data reveal that university personnel interactions with student government leaders were positive, as more than half of participants described these interactions as supportive in nature. Regarding faculty, interactions were described as disinterested or sometimes even disapproving of student government involvement for their graduate student as it was not pertinent to their research, so they appeared to be confused about the interest in serving in a leadership role outside of an academic discipline (P10). Faculty were deemed as supportive, specifically, if they were lecturers for Student Life Skills (SLS) courses or part of a leadership academy program (P1 & P4). In those scenarios, faculty were the ones pushing students to join organizations and seek out leadership roles.

Staff were generally described as more supportive than faculty. Some participants described having minimal or no interaction with staff. Other participants described some staff as at times providing a runaround to resources but others functioning as advocates, partners, or mentors. There were also instances when a particular staff member was seen as a future aspirational career track model. Advisors were mostly described as supportive, too, but their impact came in the form of taking on multiple roles, including lending a listening ear to student needs, being flexible with students, functioning as a mentor or resource, and possessing a student-centered focus.

Interactions with administrators appeared on two extremes. On one end, they missed the student context and were hard to form relationships with, but in other instances, they were supportive. In working with administrators, students described having to display confidence, but
they also described administrators as empowering students to succeed, taking on the role of institutional guide, and being “willing to work with you. You just have to be willing to work with them” (P2).

Ultimately, student interactions with university employees range from positive to negative but are generally supportive. University staff influence student transitions not only within the scope of student government but also beyond, sometimes taking on the role of mentor. They also help students transition into their roles and responsibilities effectively by functioning as a resource to them, helping navigate through institutional policy.

Research Question 3

*How does succession planning, or lack of it, affect student leader transitions into student government roles?*

More than half of the participants determined that there was a lack of information as they transitioned into at least one of their student government roles. Of those who mentioned the importance of a transition document, which they referred to as a transition binder, 35% mentioned they had a good transition binder (P1, P12, P2, P3, P6, P7), 24% didn’t have one (P11, P13, P17, P4), and 24% mentioned being intentional about leaving one behind for successors (P11, P13, P17, P4). Consequently, the data suggest that those who failed to receive useful resources are more likely to be intentional about creating those resources for the next generation of leaders that are elected or appointed into their current roles.

The data also suggest students had to learn to be resourceful and use ingenuity to be successful in their roles, especially in times where there was a leadership vacuum (P12, P14), a
restructured division (P1, P5), or simply having to make up for lost time and work their predecessors failed to complete (P13, P4). Meanwhile, others mentioned training their successors while still holding their leadership position and the importance of leaving behind a solid groundwork and cultural changes that are sustainable (P10, P5, P17, P2, P3). Likewise, others mentioned the importance of having had a peer mentor to succeed in their student government transition (P12, P15, P16).

Comparably, most participants mentioned a great degree of their success in transitioning into their roles was due to using people as resources (P10, P12, P14, P16, P17, P2, P3, P4, P7, P9). Consequently, proper succession planning from predecessors positively affected student transitions into their role, while a lack of proper transition resources caused negative experiences that resulted in student leaders intentionally seeking out ways to train possible successors or developing operation manuals for them.

Limitations and Delimitations

Delimitations for this study included limiting the participant pool to only those in student government leadership positions. Although there are multiple members of student government, those in higher leadership roles include members of Senate Executive Committee, Executive Cabinet, Judicial branch heads, and Election Commission. Although the total population of active student government leaders is typically close to 100 leaders, limiting the population to 52 active leaders narrowed down the scope for this study. Study participants were recruited by the primary investigator using information from the student government website, which includes general contact information for student government leaders. This includes names, roles, and email addresses.
A possible limitation was the modality to conduct interviews and technical difficulties that arose as a result. In most cases, the Zoom interview session would freeze or lag, disrupting the interview process. In one instance, the Zoom call stopped working completely and half of the interview had to be rescheduled for another time. In some instances, Zoom failing to connect caused a disruption in the interview process, affecting student responses and thought processes at the time of answering interview questions. Another limitation was the overall length of the interview: Although all questions were asked, including the use of prompts and elicitations to gather data, some meetings lasted twenty to thirty minutes, as opposed to the full hour planned. It is important to note that COVID-19 was not a limitation for this study, as all participants were already operating at full capacity at the research site, fulfilling their duties as they did before the pandemic.

Implications

The findings of this study have different implications for students, university staff, and succession planning strategies. It is important to consider the nature of the organization that these students function in. Student government falls into what Bolman and Deal (2013) define as a Political Frame. This signifies that as political agents, many of the topics that arose as part of this research study are not so much a factor of individuals themselves but of the organizational culture in which they are expected to operate. The themes that appeared in this study (stress, conflict, resilience, and advocacy) are either elements affiliated with a political framework or a result of operating within a political structure (i.e., stress). A political framework is one where power is a key resource, and the objective is to move to the next higher level through influence,
negotiation, and bargaining. Since there is often a scarcity of resources, alliances and networks are often formed. Likewise, conflict is very frequent but does not signify that something is necessarily wrong.

Regarding student government leaders, this research has demonstrated the impact peer mentorship programs have on the success of student government leaders. Approximately half of the participants mentioned having had either peer support structures mentor them into their role or having participated in a mentorship program, SGLC. These same students attributed having had that form of peer support as a transition process, situational factor, social support factor, and strategy that helped them transition into their role(s). This research study has also highlighted the number of transitions student government leaders experience as a whole, starting first with 31 types of transitions, 18 processes, 16 personal factors, 20 situational factors, 10 support structures, and 23 strategies. Taking these into account can help incoming students understand not only how to effectively transition but also how to intentionally seek out the best communities and resources to make them successful in their roles.

The implications this study has for university personnel involve the value rapport building can have on a student leader’s success and willingness to stay at their institution. Participants mentioned trying to find a place to connect when they initially arrived on campus and how social support structures, among them university personnel (faculty and advisors) helped them navigate campus and find their sense of school pride. This is important to note because small exchanges matter, especially when students are interacting with university personnel in classes, orientation programs, departments, and leadership roles (RSOs, Agencies, employees). Some mentioned the impact having supportive advisors, staff, faculty, and upper
administration had on them pursuing post-graduate education, leadership opportunities, networking, and learning life skills.

Implications this research study has on succession planning reflect the importance of having individuals invested in the success of an organization and those that work within its structure. If individuals are not invested in the organizational cause (advocating for student needs), then the organizational engine will not function effectively. This can be said of student government, especially in cases where there is a leadership vacuum causing sudden role changes that hinder not only the individual (high levels of stress) but also the organization (processes fall behind and people or groups lose out on funding opportunities).

Implications for this research for Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI) is large, especially when U.S. national numbers show that as of 2018 there are 4.1 million students currently enrolled in HSIs. Research also demonstrates that there are 569 HSI institutions across all 50 states and Puerto Rico with a total of 1,968,260 of those students identifying as LatinX or Hispanic (U.S. Department of Education, 2019b; Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities, 2021). This research study was conducted at an HSI that has recently been awarded the Seal of Excelencia in Education (Seal of Excellence in Education), one of the ten intuitions to be granted this annual award, and only one of 24 institutions nationwide to have received the award altogether (Williams, 2021). Due to this designation and national classification, study results may prove to be applicable to other HSI schools in states like Texas, California, New Jersey, Illinois, New Mexico, New York, and Puerto Rico (HACU List of Hispanic-Serving Institutions, 2020).
Recommendations for Future Research

As there is limited research focused on exploring student leadership experiences in student government impact in higher education, there are yet significant gaps regarding this topic. The following are some recommendations for future research on the subject:

1. Running a Hierarchical Linear Regression model to test involvement in student government, registered student organizations, and academic discipline.

2. Conducting a multisite research study for all twelve public state institutions in Florida that focuses on the impact student government has on university governance.

3. Conducting a mixed-methods study targeting LatinX or Hispanic student government leader experiences in Florida. This is relevant research as there are currently three public state universities that have been designated as Hispanic Serving Institutions in Florida. Another recommendation related to HSIs would be to conduct the research across all 569 HSI designated institutions.

4. Applying Leadership-Member Exchange theory to student government leader practices using a quantitative approach (survey sent to multiple institutions across the southeast region).

5. Leading a comparative quantitative research study of student government transitions that intentionally incorporates data from state colleges and not just state universities.

Conclusion

This research study provided information about the meaning student government leaders form as they transitioned into their current roles, using Schlossberg’s transition theory (2012) as the principal theoretical framework. It also addressed the limited amount of research related to
this population of students, specifically out-of-date data related to this subject matter (research is more than ten years old). This study also revealed emerging themes that appeared as participants transitioned into their roles: (1) stress, (2) conflict, (3) advocacy, (4) resiliency, and (5) boundaries. Implications of this research impact both student leaders and university personnel and take into account how organizational culture influences transitions. Recommendations for this study consisted of future forms of both qualitative and quantitative research with a focus on student government leaders in Florida, the Southeast U.S., and the nation.
APPENDIX A: INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
1. What transitions have you experienced as a result of your role in student government?
2. What was the transition process like when you first started, while you've been in your role, and how do you anticipate it ending?
3. What are some situational factors that have impacted your transition into student government?
4. What are some personal factors that you perceive have helped your transition into this role?
5. What social support structures have helped you in this role?
6. How have interactions with university staff influenced your role in student government?
7. What strategies have you employed to transition into your role?
8. How has succession planning or lack of it, affected your transition into your student government role?
9. What impact and meaning have you gained from your transition into your student government role?
APPENDIX B: IRB APPROVAL
EXEMPTION DETERMINATION

October 1, 2021

Dear Bonnieblue Rodriguez-Valentin:

On 10/1/2021, the IRB determined the following submission to be human subjects research that is exempt from regulation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Review:</th>
<th>Initial Study, Category 2(ii)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title:</td>
<td>Student Government: A phenomenological study of student government leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investigator:</td>
<td>Bonnieblue Rodriguez-Valentin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IRB ID:</td>
<td>STUDY00003447</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding:</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grant ID:</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Documents Reviewed:
- Coding categories for Transitions, Category: Other;
- HRP 254 2, Category: Consent Form;
- HRP 255, Category: IRB Protocol;
- HRP 316, Category: Other;
- Interview questions, Category: Interview / Focus Questions;
- SG Email Text, Category: Other;
- SG Survey, Category: Survey / Questionnaire;
- SG Survey, Category: Survey / Questionnaire

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made, and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please submit a modification request to the IRB. Guidance on submitting Modifications and Administrative Check-in are detailed in the Investigator Manual (HRP-103), which can be found by navigating to the IRB Library within the IRB system. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request so that IRB records will be accurate.

If you have any questions, please contact the UCF IRB at 407-823-2901 or irb@ucf.edu. Please include your project title and IRB number in all correspondence with this office.

Sincerely,

Katie Kilgore
Designated Reviewer
APPENDIX C: PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT EMAIL
Hi Legislative, Executive, Judicial, and Election Commission leaders!

My name is Bonnieblue and I am doctoral candidate in UCF’s College of Community Innovation and Education. I am conducting a research study on student government leader experiences and would love for you to participate. As a student government leader and advocate of student rights, you are eligible to participate in this paid research study if you:

- Are at least 18 years old
- Have served as a student government leader at UCF

Participants can receive an Amazon e-gift card of up to $20. To participate, you will complete a sign-up survey, followed by a calendar scheduling link to select a preferred interview slot. Following the interview, you will be provided with interview transcripts to review and approve.

If you would like to learn more about the study and sign up to participate, follow the link below. Space is limited to the first students who sign up and qualify to participate, so don’t miss this opportunity to lend a voice of the student government experience!

Follow this link to the Survey:
[Take the Survey Link]

If you have questions, email me at bonnieblue@ucf.edu.

Thank you for serving your student body!

Go Knights!
APPENDIX D: EXPLANATION OF RESEARCH
EXPLANATION OF RESEARCH

Title of Project: Student Government: A phenomenological study of student government leaders

Principal Investigator: Bonnieblue Rodriguez-Valentin

Other Investigators: Nancy Marshall

Faculty Supervisor: Nancy Marshall

You are being invited to take part in this research study.

The purpose of this study is to describe the experiences of student government leaders as they transition to their leadership role in student government. Whether you take part is up to you, as there is a scarcity of research surrounding student government, your participation is crucial to shedding light on the value of student governance in higher education.

If you choose to participate, click on the calendly link (see below) to schedule an interview time. Interviews will be done via zoom in the next three weeks. The interview will last an hour where you will be asked a series of interview questions. To facilitate note taking, the live transcript and record feature will be used via zoom. Prior to the interview you will be asked to complete a brief survey (see below).

The duration of this study is two hours. This includes time for the interview, interaction via email, and review of the transcript file.

You will be video recorded during this study. If you do not want to be recorded, you will not be able to participate in the study. The recording will be kept in a locked, safe place. The recording will then be erased or destroyed after the study is finalized.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You must be a UCF student to participate in this study. You are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation in this study at any time without prejudice or penalty. Your decision to participate or not participate in this study will in no way affect your relationship with UCF, including continued enrollment, grades, employment, or your relationship with the individuals who may have an interest in this study.

Identifiable information will include student government role, gender, and academic year. The principal investigator of this study will have access to the information gathered along with the faculty advisor of this study.

Data will be stored in a password protected drive and the information will be retained for at least 5 years for future research in this area.
Compensation for participation of this study will be in the form of an Amazon Gift Card with a value of $20.00.

You must be 18 years of age or older to take part in this research study.

**Study contact for questions about the study or to report a problem:** If you have questions, concerns, or complaints contact Bonnieblue Rodriguez-Valentin, Graduate Student, Educational Leadership, Ed D. Program, College of Community Innovation and Education, 407-823-0548 or Dr. Nancy Marshall, Faculty Supervisor, College of Community Innovation and Education at 407-823-5259 or by email at bonnieblue@ucf.edu.

**IRB contact about your rights in this study or to report a complaint:** If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or have concerns about the conduct of this study, please contact Institutional Review Board (IRB), University of Central Florida, Office of Research, 12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501, Orlando, FL 32826-3246 or by telephone at (407) 823-2901, or email irb@ucf.edu.

**SG Survey:** (INSERT LINK HERE)
**Calendly Link:** (INSERT LINK HERE)
APPENDIX E: SURVEY
Explanation of Research
1. Consent form
   a. Yes, I have read Explanation of Research signature block

Survey
1. Insert First and Last Name
2. Insert your preferred email address
3. Select all that apply as your student government affiliations
   a. Executive branch
   b. Judicial branch
   c. Legislative branch
   d. Election Commission
4. What is your class ranking (by credit hours)?
   a. Freshman
   b. Sophomore
   c. Junior
   d. Senior
   e. Graduate Student
5. What is your gender?
   a. Male
   b. Female
   c. Other
6. Select your racial demographic group(s)
   a. LatinX or Hispanic
   b. White
   c. Asian or Pacific Islander
   d. Bi-racial
   e. Black
   f. Multi-racial
   g. Native American, American Indian, or First Nations

*Calendly redirect to select calendar availability for interview slots.*
APPENDIX F: THEME CODING
Themes that emerged from the study included stress, conflict, advocacy, and resiliency.

I. Transitions
   1. Meaning and impact
      i. Conflict
      ii. Role change
      iii. Advocacy
         1. Celebrating different cultures
         2. Supporting RSOs
         3. Positive impact
   iv. Stress Management
   v. Mindfulness
      1. Humbling
      2. Grateful
   vi. Advocacy
   vii. Shift in career track
   viii. Remembering your purpose

2. Transition types
   i. Mentorship programs
      1. SGLC
   ii. Taking the leap
   iii. Persistence
   iv. Adapt
   v. Concurrent roles
      1. Housing
      2. University departments
      3. Agencies
      4. RSOs
      5. Internships
   vi. Stepping back
   vii. Working with different people
   viii. Sense of belonging on campus
   ix. Increased responsibility
   x. Adjusting to new culture within SG
   xi. Fast-paced environment
   xii. Overwhelming
   xiii. Resistance

3. Transition process
   i. Culture shock
   ii. Stressful
   iii. Confusing
   iv. Supported by peers
   v. Time management
   vi. Collaborative
vii. Medical leave
viii. Role change
ix. Catch up
x. Work-life balance
xi. Neurodiversity

4. Situational factors
   i. COVID
      1. High expectations
   ii. Leadership vacuum
   iii. New Opportunities
   iv. Other jobs
   v. Self-care
      1. Mental health
         a. CAPS
         b. Neuro-divergent

5. Self-factors
   i. Resiliency
   ii. Transferable skillset
      1. Prior SG involvement
      2. RSO affiliation
      3. University jobs
         a. Resident Assistant
   iii. Determination
   iv. Open-minded
   v. Task-oriented
   vi. Highly involved
   vii. Diversity representation

6. Support factors
   i. Family
   ii. Friends
   iii. Communities
      1. Religious affiliation
   iv. SG Peers
      1. Mentors

7. Strategies
   i. Healthy lifestyle
      1. Time management
         a. Calendars
         b. To do lists
         c. planners
      2. Work-life balance
         a. Saying no
b. After-hours
   c. Small wins/celebrations
   d. Educating others on boundaries
3. Relying on supportive networks
   a. Staying hydrated

II. University staff interactions
   a. Staff
      i. Supportive
      ii. Disinterested
      iii. Engagers
      iv. Navigators
      v. Empower
      vi. Apply skills
      vii. Unaware
         1. Not as aware of common issues students face
         2. Miss student context to solve issues

   b. Students
      i. Need to provide digestible information to them

III. Succession planning
   a. Operations manual
      i. Present
      ii. Not present
   b. Restructuring
   c. Availability of predecessor
   d. Building from the ground up
   e. Training
Figure 1 4S Model for Student Government Transitions
REFERENCES


