NAVIGATING ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE IN THE JOB SEARCH

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Researchers have examined the transitional issues recent student affairs master's graduates face in their first year on the job (Renn & Hodges, 2007). What remains missing is how these graduates navigate issues of institutional culture before they are hired – during the job search. This study focused on filling that gap and identified relationships and congruence with personal philosophy and goals as key themes for job seekers.

Scholars examining the job experiences of student affairs program graduates in the past decade has focused on how graduate programs prepare students for the field of student affairs (Ardoin, 2014; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008; Gardner & Barnes, 2007); the student affairs job search experience, (Clay et al., 2014); and student affairs on-the-job socialization (Pierson, 2014; Piskaldo & Johnson, 2014; Renn & Hodges, 2007; Stewart, 2014; Tull, Hirt, & Saunders, 2009).

At the end of Renn and Hodges's (2007) article on the experiences of student affairs professionals in their first year of full-time work, the authors reflected on the future of the study's participants. They wrote: "And will they remember how hard it was to know ahead of time how good or poor the institutional fit would really be?" (Renn & Hodges, 2007, p. 388). Additional literature continues to stress the challenges of newer student affairs professionals navigating institutional culture (Buchanan & Schupp, 2015; Hirschy, Wilson, Liddell, Boyle, & Pasquesi, 2015; Magolda & Carnaghi, 2014) and other recent scholarship pushes against the idea of institutional "fit" instead stressing the importance of belonging in student affairs (Reece, Tran, DeVore, & Porcaro, 2019). In an effort to more fully explore the experiences of emerging professionals in student affairs, the research question for this study was: How do recent student affairs master's program graduates navigate institutional culture during the job search?

Existing Literature

Institutional culture is an important aspect of transition (Ardoin, 2014; Collins, 2009; Hirt, 2009; Jones & Segawa, 2004; Ouchi & Wilkins, 1985; Rousseau, 1990; Schein 1985, 1990). Jones and Segawa (2004) suggested, "Part of determining whether a [student affairs] job opportunity is the right fit requires diligently exploring the culture of a potential work environment," (p. 67). The authors analyzed narratives of four professionals and suggested moving beyond organizational structure and policies to also explore institutional values, beliefs about students, and campus artifacts to provide a deeper understanding of organizational culture.

Much of the existing literature has focused on how new student affairs professionals navigate workplace issues and personal expectations in the first year on the job. Studies have examined the role of relationships, fit, and competence in the experience of new(er) professionals (Reas Hall, 2014; Renn & Hodges, 2007). Other scholars have written on student affairs professionals navigating institutional culture after starting positions (Hirt, 2009; Kuh, 2009; Magolda, & Carnaghi, 2004, 2014; Stringer, 2009; and Winston & Creamer, 1997). However, little is known about the ways in which emerging professionals explore culture during the job search process itself. In an attempt to address this void, this study engaged with current student affairs master's students in the job search process.

Impact of Culture on Members

Researchers have examined the influence of organizational culture on the experiences of college students (Berger, 2001; Gansemer-Topf & Schuh, 2006; Kuh, 2001; Richardson & Skinner, 1990). Additionally, scholars examined the role of institutional culture in job-seeking and hiring in certain fields such as telecommunications (Carless, 2005), transportation (Lauver & Kristof-Brown, 2001), accounting (Chatman, 1989b; Swider, Zimmerman, & Barrick, 2015), retail careers (Oh, Weitz, & Lim, 2016), and academic librarianship (Eckard, Rosener, & Scripps-Hoekstra, 2014). However, scholarship focused on the experiences of new student affairs professionals navigating organizational culture during job searches is lacking.

Organizational culture and undergraduate students. In exploring the role of organizational culture in undergraduate student experiences, Astin and Scherrei (1980) and Strange (1991) found that

highly bureaucratic organizational cultures could create barriers to collegiality, senses of belonging, and integration of students within organizations. Other studies found that institutional level decision-making can affect undergraduate student retention and graduation rates (Berger, 2001; Kuh, 2001; Gansemer-Topf & Schuh, 2006). If organizational culture and decision-making influence students, in what ways does culture impact the job search processes of new(er) student affairs professionals who were recently college students themselves?

The role of culture in job seeking and hiring. Diener, Larsen, and Emmons (1984) wrote that people select environments that fulfill their needs, which they referred to as person–environment or person-organization fit. Tom (1971) found that job seekers prefer organizations that have the same personality they do. Additionally, congruence between organizational and individual values and culture is important during the job search (Cable & Judge, 1996; Judge & Bretz, 1991; Swider, Zimmerman, & Barrick, 2015). Judge and Bretz (1991) defined this congruence as alignment between job-seekers values and perceived organizational values.

New(er) Student Affairs Professionals in the Workplace

Renn and Hodges (2007) explored issues related to student affairs staff during their first year of work after completing their graduate program. Additional scholarship on the experiences of student affairs graduates transitioning into the workplace focused on graduate preparation (Collins, 2009; Gardner & Barnes, 2007; Kuk & Cuyjet, 2009; Liddell, Wilson, Pasquesi, Hirschy, & Boyle, 2014; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008). Consideration has also been given to experiences of new(er) professionals on the job in terms of job satisfaction (Tull, Hirt, & Saunders, 2009), attrition and retention (Belch, Wilson, & Dunkel, 2009), and supervision (Tull, 2009).

Lombardi and Mather (2016) explored the transitions of recent graduates into the workplace and focused specifically on the job search process. They identified fit as a way of identifying with organizations and included "whether or not the participants connected with colleagues" (p. 89) as a part of fit rather than as something separately navigated. Additionally, Lombardi and Mather's (2016) study surfaced themes of relationships with significant others, organizational communication, confidence, comparisons with others, expectations, and seeking connections as themes of anticipatory socialization. Their work also fits with that of Tull, Hirt, and Saunders (2009) who focused on transition experiences of new professionals and similarly found the roles of relationships and an understanding of the organization to be essential to both expectations and actual experiences in the socialization process.

Framework

The idea of organizational culture emerged in the 1980s (Ouchi & Wilkins, 1985; Schein, 1985, 1990). This concept drew from anthropology, sociology, and social psychology and focused on cultural concepts such as rites and rituals, organizational storytelling, and language (Ouchi & Wilkins, 1985; Swidler, 1986). Schein (1990) used an ethnographic approach to define culture as the assumptions, values, and artifacts of organizations. Rousseau (1990) contributed to thinking on organizational culture identifying common elements such as behaviors, norms, and expectations. Additional considerations when examining institutional culture are symbols and cultural activities (Schein, 1985).

The idea of person-organization fit is defined as compatibility between individuals and organizations based on needs, shared characteristics, or both (Kristof, 1996). Chatman (1989a) wrote that congruency of the values of the person/people and the organization are the foundation of person-organization fit. Schneider (1987) described this as the estimated match between the job seeker's personality, attitudes, and val-

ues and the organization's culture (values, goals, structure, and processes).

The research question for this study was: How do recent student affairs master's program graduates navigate institutional culture during the job search? This study uses the concepts of participant experiences of organizational culture (Ouchi & Wilkins, 1985; Rousseau, 1990; Schein, 1990) related to assumptions, values, behaviors, norms, and expectations. Additionally, the data highlights the importance of congruence between personal and organizational values (Chatman, 1989a; Schneider, 1987) for participants during their job searches.

Methodology
Data Collection & Analysis

This study involved 15 participants (six men and nine women) between the ages of 24 and 26 who were interviewed during their job searches. Participants were part of a convenience sample of students in the programs where I had taught the previous two years. An email was sent to graduating cohorts at both institutions inviting students to participate. All of the men and six women where white, one woman was African American, and two women were Latinx. The participants were part of a convenience sample of recent graduates of student affairs programs at two research one land-grant institutions – one in the Midwest and the other in the Southeast.

I used a qualitative approach to surface participants' knowledge and collect deep and rich data (Creswell, 2014). Using a constructivist approach allowed participants to make individualized meaning of their experiences (Creswell, 2014; Crotty, 1998; Mertens, 2010) related to navigating institutional culture. Semi-structured interviews allowed participants to define their experiences through the emergence of themes outside of the scripted interview questions (Patton, 2002). Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. I then used open-coding (Maxwell, 2005) to identify themes based on interview transcripts.

I used reflective memos throughout the interview process followed by open coding for themes to determine what data was relevant to this line of scholarship (Creswell, 2014). Additionally, once themes were identified, I worked with peer debriefers who were both former student affairs professionals and currently student affairs faculty members to enhance the accuracy of the findings (Creswell, 2014). Using these strategies, I sought to address the research question: How do recent student affairs graduates navigate issues of institutional culture in their first job search after completing their master's degrees?

In exploring how recent student affairs graduates of practitioner-focused programs navigate institutional culture in the job search, I examined responses in terms of how participants assessed person-organization fit using Schneider's (1987) focus on relationships in conjunction with organizational culture elements from other studies (Ouchi & Wilkins, 1985; Rousseau, 1990; Schein, 1990). More specifically, I looked at how participants assessed the alignment between their personalities, attitudes, and values and the potential work culture during the job search.

Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability as elements of trustworthiness of qualitative scholarship. Per Creswell's (2014) recommendations I employed peer debriefing to ensure the accounts provided would resonate with others in the field; prolonged engagement to ensure an understanding of the experiences of participants in the context of their unique job searches; and member checks to ensure my understanding of participant accounts was accurate. Current and former student affairs professionals (including some working as faculty members) reviewed the data. I engaged with participants in the research process during their time in the master's program and for a year after (first during the

job search, then at the midpoint of their first fall in their new positions, and finally at the end of the first academic year in their new positions). During these conversations we discussed their experiences of institutional culture. Finally, during member checks participants not only reviewed their transcripts, we also discussed emergent themes to ascertain the trustworthiness of the findings.

Findings

Recent graduates of student affairs programs were asked how they navigated organizational culture in the job search process. They defined organizational culture at an institution based on research, observations, and questions they asked during interviews. Their responses fell almost exclusively into two categories – relationships and congruence. Relationships included relationships with supervisors, colleagues, and students. Congruence dealt with issues of alignment between personal and organizational values.

Relationships

Relationship issues were by far the most important aspect of organizational culture to participants in this study. Participants talked about work experiences including: interpersonal connections, communication, work relationships (collegiality, collaboration, sense of team), and approachability. Participants also made observations about hierarchy and how it fostered (or hindered) relationships.

Relationships with Colleagues. Participants talked at length about connecting with colleagues and were wary if those connections did not emerge during the campus visit. Susan said:

> If I'm having a really hard time relating or making conversation or if the conversation comes to a wall… maybe this just isn't the kind of office environment I want to work in.

Candidates assessed office culture from the moment they first engaged with potential colleagues during interviews.

Tiffany agreed that the people involved in interviews helped her understand depart-

mental culture. She said, "I definitely want to enjoy my coworkers and the people that I'm working with because that's very important to me because I feel like the culture needs to be right." Calvin added,

> Something important to me is I want to go to work and not have it be completely work. For me, that would turn [work] into something that I dread… There's work life balance but there's something to be said about enjoying being in people's company when you're doing work. Feeling like you actually know somebody on a personal level and it's not just, "What can we do for each other on this work level?" Actually wanting to know somebody as a person so when you're working together it's a lot smoother and more personable.

For these participants, the focus was on relationships with colleagues beyond work tasks and included personal connections.

Others added that good personal relationships not only fostered a positive environment, but also improved the quality of the work done. Rachel said, "If I feel comfortable around people, it influences everything else. It influences how decisions are made, how policies are made." Gavin also connected work relationships with job performance.

> I hope that it's also about being a part of a team - almost our own little cohort of colleagues. Some people see a cohort more as a family, and I don't know if I necessarily see it as a family. I think that term can be overused a little bit, but I do hope to be in a community of colleagues. I know it can take a while to become a community. You almost have to fall apart slightly, a little bit, to really then become stronger at the end of the day so you can be honest with one another. I do hope to be in a true community of colleagues where we can support one another and be honest with one another and just really utilize each other's strengths.

Sara added:

I want to make sure that the time that I spend with colleagues is going to be enjoyable – and that I'm going to want to go to lunch with these people… and that I can work with them on a daily basis and get along with them and appreciate our relationship.

In fact, Sara turned down job offers because she did not feel a connection with her potential colleagues. She said:

I could tell their personalities were very different than mine because it was a struggle to have a conversation – we weren't connecting. And if I don't feel that connection then that's a problem for me… Especially if you're spending a whole day with them and it's a struggle the whole time - that's a red flag for me.

Participants observed the actions of others and how current staff engaged with one another. They paid attention to what was said, non-verbal reactions, and ways that potential future colleagues engaged.

Across all interviews, participants talked about the value of relationships. They discussed the importance of enjoying spending time with colleagues on a daily basis as well as relationships as a catalyst for increased work productivity and better service to students. Brian shared that this was highlighted in how current staff engaged with him during a campus visit.

[The staff] referenced my cover letter and resume during the interview. They were like, "Tell me about this. Tell me about that." I'm like, "Oh my gosh, no one has asked me about these things." So that was really cool… just building those relationships, wanting to authentically get to know me as a person, as opposed to, "We're doing 85 interviews, you're one of them. Be awesome and then we're going to move on to the next person." No, I legitimately felt validated during those interviews.

Work relationships were a key part of participants' assessment of the culture and the ways in which they would engage, be treated, and find connection in new jobs.

Collaboration. Beyond the observation of relationships, participants were attentive to behaviors that represented (or failed to represent) a sense of team. As Brittany said, "I really value working in a collaborative environment and being able to outreach to other colleagues."

The primary way participants assessed collegiality and collaboration in their potential departments, was by asking questions. They probed and solicited examples of ways in which teams functioned. Sally said, "I ask, 'How has this worked for you this past couple of years?' I think something that will probably help me get acclimated is asking questions about the office dynamic: Whom do I work with? How do we collaborate?"

Jayne also talked about asking questions, but she asked about a task she had to complete as a part of one campus interview, saying:

I was asking them questions about what I could have done better… They were jumping in saying, "This is how we do it," and showing me what they do. That gave me a good impression because it showed that if I were to be sitting in that very desk, doing that very thing, they would be willing to jump in and help.

From these interactions participants got a sense of how being able to ask questions (and get substantive responses) during an interview might represent what their work with colleagues would be like.

Participants also talked about having access to colleagues. They described this in a variety of ways from colleagues having open doors to new colleagues being available and willing to answer questions or provide help and support. They stressed that in a collegial environment building relationships would not be solely incumbent upon them as new professionals reaching out, but would be reciprocated by outreach from established team members. Calvin said he hoped to see colleagues, "going out of their way to come sit down and talk versus me going to them… Pointing out which office

theirs is and letting me know I can pop my head in and say hello." Jayne added, "[My ideal environment] is one that would be highly collaborative and also very open. The type of place where I would feel comfortable going and knocking on anyone's door." In these and other comments from participants, navigating culture during the interview included assessing the approachability of colleagues.

Hierarchy. In addition to daily interactions, participants talked about the role of hierarchy understanding organizational culture. While participants understood the complexity of student affairs and higher education, they expressed a need to be valued and connected to the vision and mission of their potential campuses. As Tiffany said, "I don't really want to be seen as a number or just another cog in the machine."

Participants talked about organizational structure and the ways that they – as new staff members – would engage with others at different levels of the unit, department, and division. Calvin said, "I want to understand how they work with one another based off their structure. For me a good question would be essentially asking how the chain of command works. I am thinking about how they structure who supports whom."

Having a sense of organizational structure also helped them assess how much engagement they might have with top-level administrators. Maggie talked about one interview where staff shared that they went to lunch together each day.

At one of the campus interviews I really appreciated that everyone went out to lunch together every single day because that way you were able to see people who weren't necessarily in your building. I really liked that because you still got to talk to the entire department every day and everyone was very accessible, like, the Director as well as the VP of Residence Life. So, I thought that was a really good thing that they were doing to shape their work culture be-

cause everyone was on the same playing field.

Tyler also talked about engaging with the Vice President on one of his campus interviews. He said,

One of the things that kind of shook me, is interesting and something I didn't think would happen. I actually got to interview with the Vice President for Student Affairs for about a half an hour. Going on an on campus interview I figured that would never happen for an entry-level position. So that just kind of showed me that they were very concerned with everybody working within the division and how their strengths and talents fit within the university and how they can help achieve the kind of new image that they're going toward so those were things that reassured me that this was going to be a good place to be.

The involvement of upper-level administrators sent a message to candidates about organizational culture. Seeing other administrators sent positive messages to participants about teamwork, achieving organizational goals, and the accessibility of leadership. This connects to the idea of the importance of relationships in new work cultures. Specifically, this speaks to the value participants put on relationships at all levels of the organization.

Relationships with Students. While relationships with colleagues and administrators mattered, relating to and interacting with students was also important. Every participant talked about the value of engaging with students during interviews. Susan said, "Students give you the unfiltered, unsolicited 'Here's my real view on campus.' If you have time with just the students without staff members you really get a good feel for the campus culture." Maggie agreed saying, "I feel like [students] are not going to try and hoodwink you. They want you to see the real deal." Not only did participants value student interactions, those interactions often provided job seekers with what they

perceived to be the clearest pictures of what the institutional culture was.

Even though not all participants had the chance to meet directly with students, they each discussed strategies for assessing how they would connect and engage with students, and how those interactions reflected on the culture of the institution. Sara said:

> Interviewing with students matters a lot. The majority of your time is spent with students… It makes it a lot harder when you have students you don't connect with, so if I feel like I'm having to put on a persona or say certain things a certain way – if I feel like I can't be myself with them, that's a red flag.

The potential to develop relationships with students was essential to the day-to-day work and overall experience job seekers expected to have.

Tiffany said that student interactions helped her "gauge the temperature of the campus." Participants understood that their work would be with students and supporting students. Just as with colleagues, participants saw a sense of connection with students as an important aspect and reflection of institutional culture. Given the amount of time that participants knew they would be spending with students, they wanted to make sure that they would be able to build good mentoring, advising, and supervising relationships with students on campus. This was in part due to the desire for participants to be themselves and they also wanted to make sure they could meet the needs and expectations of students on the campus where they would be working.

Participants were also attentive to how current staff engaged with students. Gavin said, "My interviews were in the student center and seeing students walk by and talking to the people interviewing me, seeing the interaction and how authentic it was – that helped me see the culture." Rachel added, "I'm looking at what [current staff members'] advising philosophy is, how they're working with students, whether or not they're creating policies that fit the needs of students." In exploring institutional culture, participants were again making observations – this time about students – to understand the culture.

Congruence with Personal Philosophy

During their job searches participants sought workplaces that would be congruent with their values as emerging professionals. Sally said people in one of her interviews talked about how their work supported the institutional mission. "They spoke about pieces of the mission I had researched or thought about. The mission and their work aligned, without them saying word for word, 'This is our mission.'" The congruence of mission with work and with participants' personal philosophies was a focus during interviews. For many participants, feeling a sense of belonging was about working toward common goals with shared vision. Key subthemes in this area included: philosophy related to social justice and congruence with personal goals.

Philosophy related to social justice. In no aspect of the interviews did the issue of congruence emerge more than when participants discussed social justice. Participants were not satisfied with merely position description or vision statement language. During their interviews they asked about incidents they had read about no campus. They looked for potential colleagues to be able to talk about the work that the institution did well, but also the areas where there was work to be done. Participants probed to understand how social justice was part of the work done on campus. Beyond philosophy, they sought information related to action.

Drew said, "Everyone has diversity stuff in their mission statement, but I wanted to actually see how they use social justice in their work." Brittany added, "It was important for me to understand the culture as it relates to social justice and equity and how the department handles different crises or situations that may arise relating to social justice." Participants went to interviews with

specific questions about social justice. How staff talked about and prioritized underrepresented and marginalized populations was essential to candidates.

Some participants also sought to understand how they would be valued as staff members holding non-dominant identities. Maggie said:

> The questions I'm asking are a really good way to see how the fit would be for me individually, as well as for the larger demographic groups – both gender and race. I want to be at a place that supports me and also has some sort of diverse culture.

Social justice was at the intersection of institutional culture, the work to be done, and participants' identities. Participants expected staff to be able to answer questions about social justice on their campus.

Some participants shared experiences they had where staff did not have good responses to social justice related questions. Maggie said one person acknowledged his campus was "20 years behind the rest of the country." Drew added that staff at one of his interviews failed to acknowledge things he had researched. He said:

> I looked up their school and the Students of Color made a list of things they wanted and had listed ways they were not feeling supported. I thought it was interesting that [current staff] didn't touch on that at all since it had just happened the day before.

The inability or unwillingness of staff to have conversations about campus issues surprised participants. Participants did not expect any campus to be perfect, but there was an expectation that organizations and staff were actively engaged in social justice work.

Some schools more effectively discussed campus climate and social justice work than others. Maggie said, "When I asked [one campus] about their own diversity and social justice education they lit up and were like, 'Here's what we've been doing.' I was like, 'Okay. They're not just saying stuff. They're

putting it in action, too.'" Sally said when potential colleagues showed enthusiasm it reinforced the importance of social justice work on a given campus. She noted, "There was just such an excitement to share the work that they're doing or how it impacted certain communities." The fact that current staff were enthusiastic about initiatives on campus was important to job-seekers.

Other participants talked about diversity and social justice in terms of job tasks. Grace said her work would be "to serve marginalized students both formally and informally." Brittany added, "My students are who I was a few years ago. I want to work somewhere that I can be the person I needed then." Some participants framed the way social justice work was done specifically in connection to potential roles and how institutions supported that work. Just as participants looked to staff to be able to dialogue about and engage in social justice work, students' language around social justice indicated to participants whether or not their social justice values aligned with institutional social justice values.

Congruence with personal goals. Beyond congruence around social justice, emerging professionals in this study sought jobs that provided opportunities to learn and grow in other ways, as well. Calvin said he sought positions that would "get my career off the ground," and added, "I'm hoping to be in a work culture that really supports professional development – something that I take very seriously." Participants wanted to make sure their goals matched what workplaces could offer. Every participant mentioned either professional development or wanting to make sure the goals of the organization to which they had applied aligned with their own goals in terms of their careers and desire to continue learning and developing as professionals.

When that shared commitment was not present, participants noticed and decided that those institutions or offices were not places where they wanted to work. For example, Sara shared the director at one cam-

pus interview showed no interest in Laura as a person. She said, "When we had lunch one-on-one she didn't ask me a single question about myself or my interest or my goals or anything and so I kind of left feeling like, 'How do you know who I am?'"

As emerging professionals who valued students and colleagues, participants also wanted organizations to value them. Professional development was an example of how participants saw the value institutions placed on them. Tiffany said that professional development, "is about feeling like I *am* being valued and *will* be valued... I think it would be great to have an entry-level position to build me up for different opportunities in the future." Gavin agreed and added that professional development was an investment that paid a return not only to the staff member, but also to the organization. He said, "I want professional development not just for my own benefit but so I'm learning more how to work and engage with students." How institutions provided professional development was another important way participants assessed institutional culture in terms of the value it put on employees.

Discussion

It was important for study participants to have a sense that they would be in environments that fostered good working relationships and aligned with their personal philosophies.

Relationships

Participants stressed the need to have good working relationships with their new colleagues. Relationships in the workplace cut across organizational rites and rituals (Ouichi & Wilkins, 1985), values (Schein, 1990), and behaviors, norms, and expectations (Rousseau, 1990). Participants talked at length about connecting with colleagues. This aligns with previous scholarship about new student affairs professionals' experiences in their first year on the job (Renn & Hodges, 2007). While previous scholarship included references to good rapport, comments from participants in this study fo-

cused much more on interpersonal connections that included but went beyond work engagement. Multiple participants talked about being able to drop by offices to talk about work or to say hello and build personal connections which would constitute workplace rites (Ouichi & Wilkins, 1985), values (Schein, 1990), and behaviors and norms (Rousseau, 1990). Participants wanted to have a sense that they were valued, and they assessed this beginning in their interviews for jobs. These expectations and assumptions are important to organizational culture (Schein, 1990; Rousseau, 1990).

Participants went on to talk about collaboration and the role of hierarchy in terms of professional sense of belonging beyond their own offices. As Strayhorn (2012) noted, sense of belonging is influenced by institutional culture. The primary focus, however, was on how participants assessed their ability to connect with colleagues. The importance of support from people in the culture and a sense of connection with others is a key aspect of the transition into the first year on the job as others have found (Reas Hall, 2014; Renn & Hodges, 2007; Smith, 2014). Emerging professionals are actively looking for personal connections and potential people to provide support during the job search. Participants got much of this information through storytelling (Ouichi & Wilkins, 1985; Swidler, 1986). Additionally, seeing that potential colleagues valued relationships with one another helped participants see how their values aligned with the organization (Chatman, 1998a; Schein, 1990; Schneider, 1987).

The role of students on a campus in assessing belonging was also central to participants. Through interviews, observing students, and watching staff interactions with students, participants assessed the culture more broadly. Participants who were able to interview with students relied on them to give an accurate portrait of what the institution was like. Other scholars have stressed the importance of culture on the experience of students (Kuh, 2001) and the role of col-

leagues in institutional culture (Magolda & Carnaghi, 2004, 2014), however the role of currently enrolled undergraduates in the decision-making of job-seekers is a new finding and adds to literature about emerging professionals.

Student-staff relationships inform organizational culture in terms of behaviors and norms (Rousseau, 1990) as well as values (Schein, 1990). Person-organization alignment that emerged in this study is informed by the notion of fit in previous literature (Cable & Judge, 1996; Carless, 2005; Lauver & Kristof-Brown, 2001; Swider, Zimmerman, & Barrick, 2015). The way participant values around student engagement aligned with organizational values are an important example of alignment from this study.

Congruence with Personal Philosophy

While existing literature highlighted the role of institutional culture (Astin & Scherrei, 1980; Strange, 1991), this study surfaces the role of institutional culture around social justice and its importance to recent graduates in the job search process. The alignment of personal philosophy was particularly focused on issues of social justice for all participants and highlights the importance of congruence between personal and organizational values (Chatman, 1989a; Schein, 1990; Schneider, 1987). All but two (13 of 15) study participants mentioned social justice. Some talked about social justice in terms of work in the jobs they applied for. Others focused on social justice related to student experiences, and still others discussed social justice as an aspect of their own identities and how participants felt they would be valued. Most talked about multiple aspects of social justice overlapping these three areas.

Hirt (2009) found alignment with personal philosophy included individuals' ability to see their priorities in the institutional mission. In this study participants focused on how staff talked about institutional or departmental mission in the context of the work they did on a daily basis. This also fits with Ouchi and Wilkins' (1985) idea of or-

ganizational storytelling. Additionally, participants were very attentive to staff in interviews who were not able to talk in depth about the social justice philosophy of their departments. Participants also had concerns about interviewers who simply recited the mission statement without providing further insight into how it informed the work.

Participants talked about asking questions directly and observing interactions between staff members during interviews. They also stressed the value of observing interactions between staff and students and observing and engaging with students directly. The participants in this study were not simply being interviewed, they actively engaged and assessed people with whom they talked and campuses they visited. In this way they examined behaviors and norms (Rousseau 1990).

Finally, participants wanted to see how their personal goals aligned with work environments in terms of professional development. Even though several participants mentioned promotion, development, and advancement these were not the most important areas of focus for any of the participants. This finding aligns with the work of Winston and Creamer (1997). More frequently in terms of goals, participants spoke about how organizations put their philosophies into practice and articulated vision into actionable task. If interviewers were able to discuss both the philosophy of the unit and how that philosophy showed up in daily work, participants saw that as aligning with their individual goals for future work.

Implications

This study clearly identified how recent master's graduates assessed institutional culture during the job search process. Participants assessed the collaborative nature of potential work cultures by evaluating potential relationships with colleagues and students. Additionally, they gained insight into organizational culture by observing the interactions between and existing relationships among current employees at the insti-

tution. Being aware of candidates' attention to current staff interactions is important information for search committees, hiring decision-makers, and others as they prepare for interviews with candidates. Showcasing the ways in which colleagues connect with one another both personally and professionally is important to recent graduates. Making sure candidates get a chance to see healthy team interactions is essential.

Additionally, participants valued the ways in which upper-level administrators were involved in the search process. Whether it was lunch with an entire department or with divisional leaders or a one-on-one interview with the chief student affairs officer, participants valued the accessibility of leaders during the interview process. Making time for these interactions when possible conveys powerful messages about the way the organization and institution work.

Making sure there is time with students during candidate visits was essential to nearly all participants. Since most of these recent graduates will be working directly with students, around student issues, and with student organizations, they are heavily invested in the types of students on a specific campus. Additionally, students can provide insight into the larger campus culture that professionals may not have. This provides candidates with a more complete understanding of the issues and environment where they will work.

Finally, making sure the philosophy of the department, division, and institution are discussed during the search process was important to study participants. Participants are looking for alignment between their philosophies and those of their new campus particularly related to how an office or organization supports students, engages in the work of social justice, and aligns its work with institutional mission on a daily basis.

Preparing graduate students for their upcoming interviews is often the focus of job search conversation, but making sure the organizations are prepared for job seekers is just as important. Preparing supervisors and search committees and engaging students who will provide authentic representations of the institution essential to a successful search process, an appropriate assessment of the institutional culture for job-seekers, and a key to the growth and development of successful organizations.

Examining the job search process specifically through the lenses of gender, race, sexual orientation, and other identities can provide additional important information through additional studies. How a Person of Color assesses the culture of a predominantly White institution may carry its own additional labor on the part of the job seeker and additional responsibilities on the part of the institution. Additionally, how is assessing institutional culture different for more experienced professionals applying for mid- or upper-level positions? Beyond job level are there differences in the assessment of culture based on the functional area of the search? These are questions that further research can explore to further provide guidance and information to the field of student affairs.

Conclusion

Engaging those who represent the institutional culture in training and preparation for potential staff members is at the heart of how student affairs graduates assess that culture. The people tell the story of the place. Culture is important to recent graduates seeking full-time positions in student affairs. These emerging professionals assess culture by making meaning of their interactions with people. Berger (2001) wrote, "It is important to remember that [higher education] organizations to do not behave; however, the people in those organizations do behave while acting in the service of collective organizational interests" (p. 4). Staff and students engaging in interviews with candidates need to bear in mind that they represent the organizational culture in many ways to the interviewees.

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