SENIOR STUDENT AFFAIRS OFFICERS’ PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR ROLE
IN FOSTERING AN ETHICAL CAMPUS CLIMATE

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DEDICATION

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ABSTRACT

While nearly every group or constituency at an institution of higher education has an interest in fostering an ethical campus climate, senior student affairs officers (SSAOs’) have often made efforts to analyze, interpret or strengthen the campus ethical climate. SSAOs are responsible for steering their campus settings in, and through, an ever-shifting global society; one defined by different regulatory and compliance provisions, parental inferences, student uncertainty and shrinking access to public and private funding sources. This research study examines the perceptions of senior student affairs officers (SSAOs’) regarding their role in fostering an ethical campus climate.

A narrative case study approach was used to obtain information and perspectives from several members of a regional advisory board associated with the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA). Several themes emerged from the research findings and included the senior student affairs officer’s role in a) defining and addressing ethical dilemmas, b) serving as the ethical campus leader, c) managing rapport and relationships, d) lack of ethics preparation and training. Research limitations, as well as both the theoretical and practical implications, were identified. Several suggestions were made for future research, including longitudinal research, quantitative inquiry, and an expanded examination into other campus leaders.

**Keywords**: Ethics, Ethical Campus Climate, Planned Behavior, Student Affairs, Senior Student Affairs Officer, SSAO
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Chapter 1 – Introduction

Accreditation & the Ethical Campus Climate

Accreditation is defined as a means of demonstrating that an educational institution’s programs, policies, and priorities are aligned with their stated mission and goals. The accreditation process provides an opportunity for an institution (in this case, colleges and universities) to validate and establish their accountability, both internally and externally, to various stakeholders (i.e. – students, parents, current/potential employees, current/potential financial donors, alumni, etc.). Accreditation not only helps an institution determine if they are meeting, or exceeding, their goals, but provides a baseline for determining an institution’s eligibility for federal student financial assistance. In 2014, the United States federal government allotted approximately $80 million dollars to help fund students’ pursuit of higher education (Oliff, Robyn, and Theiss, 2017).

The United States Department of Education and the Council on Higher Education Accreditation recognize six (6) higher education regional accrediting agencies in the country. When accrediting a college or university, these regional accrediting agencies collect data and share that information with nearby institutions of higher learning for the purpose of gauging and assessing the institution's programs and practices. The accrediting agencies provides support and assistance with the aim of improving the institution's educational activities and campus atmosphere. For example, according to the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (Middle States), “ethics and integrity are central, indispensable, and defining hallmarks of effective higher education institutions” (http://www.msche.org). The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) devotes a section to institutional integrity, requiring their colleges and universities to be open and honest in all of their dealings,
and strongly anticipate the senior leadership at these institutions to engage in responsible
decision-making that is fair, objective, and impartial (www.sacscoc.org).

One of the criteria used by these various regional accrediting agencies indicates that a
college or university should establish a campus ethical climate that promotes respect for all
members of the community, while complying with local, state, and federal laws. In addition,
these accrediting agencies require institutions of higher learning to assess their policies,
practices, and strategies for promoting ethics and integrity across their respective
campuses. While higher education plays an instrumental role in creating the foundation for
ethical behavior and socially responsible habits (Reybold and Halx, 2018), campuses continue to
struggle to promote and foster an ethical climate for students, faculty, and professional staff.
Reybold and Halx highlighted the responsibility of higher education institutions to demonstrate
their ability to effectively teach students, partner and support their surrounding external
community, and efficiently manage financial resources towards this aim.

**Challenges with the Campus Ethical Climate**

Colleges and universities are not immune from ethical scandals. The public image of
institutions has been damaged due to scandals involving intercollegiate athletics, such as the
University of North Carolina, where an athletic-academic scandal involving fraudulent course
offerings through their African and Afro-American Studies Department occurred and has been
referred to as one of the most notorious academic scandals in United States history (Tracy,
2017). Another scandal involving intercollegiate athletics included the child sex abuse matter
that occurred in 2009 at Pennsylvania State University (Penn State). In addition, once the U.S.
Department of Education’s Office of Civil Rights (OCR) indicated that colleges and universities
have an obligation to effectively address and eliminate sexually hostile environments on campus,
hundreds of complaints were filed by college students, including those from Yale University, Occidental College, and Amherst College (just to name a few). Although there are calls to increase access and opportunity for everyone interested in pursuing and obtaining a higher education, there is also intensified scrutiny of higher education’s ability to effectively foster an ethical climate for students, faculty, and professional staff on their respective campuses (Dey, Ott, Antonaros, Barnhardt, and Holsapple, 2013; Liddell and Cooper, 2012). Taylor and Varner (2009) indicated that colleges and universities lack the “institutional commitment” (p. 23) to educate students and others on campus regarding appropriate ethical practices and standards. Institutional commitment, as defined by Harper and Yueng (2013), is a visible, tangible promise to engage in funding or provide programs or services, that foster and support an ethical campus climate. According to Johnson (2017), while many colleges and universities have relied on compliance policies, procedures, and programs to manage and address unethical behavior, much of what has been accomplished has been ineffective in promoting and fostering an ethical campus climate.

**Ethical Campus Climate: Definition and Importance**

According to Ryder and Mitchell (2013), the campus ethical climate serves as “…a measure of people’s attitudes about, perceptions of, and experiences within a specified environment” (p. 34). While certainly the “climate for diversity” is critical, it’s but one part of ethical climate (Hurtado, Griffin, Arellano, & Cuellar, 2008), campus climate is also associated with academic culture (Peterson & Spencer, 1990), student learning (Reason, 2013), and civic outcomes such as civic engagement (Barnhardt, Sheets, & Pasquesi, 2015; Broadhurst & Martin, 2014). Victor and Cullen (1988) defined the campus ethical climate as the collective insights of what is ethically appropriate behavior. Higher education institutions that are seen as supportive
and caring are likely to foster a campus ethical climate. On the contrary, strict, aggressive, and unsupportive campus environments are more likely to promote unethical conduct as community members are more likely to focus on their self-interest.

*Student Affairs as a Profession*

Student affairs is a fairly new phenomenon in the world of higher education (Long, 2012). The beginnings of the student affairs vocation date back to the origins of American higher education in this country. Higher education institutions were empowered to oversee and address irresponsible student behavior, given their immaturity and need for strict oversight, through the notion of *in loco parentis* (Latin for “in place of the parent”). Colleges and universities during the Colonial era, in general, were poorly staffed with faculty residing in dormitories and managing oversight of student behavior. Faculty were charged with creating policies and procedures that regulated both apparel and student conduct, while administering and enforcing these guidelines even when students were not on school grounds.

Academic life in and around institutions of American higher education had drastically shifted during the mid-1800s’. The faculty at this time were significantly influenced by European—predominantly German—universities. American higher education was considerably influenced by Europeans universities, who viewed professor’s sole obligation to be the education of people who engaged in scholarly thinking. Along these lines, faculty at American colleges and universities started to procure doctorates in large numbers, created mastery in several academic fields, and demonstrated dynamic research motivation and innovation. However, as professors focused more on becoming subject matter expects, they possessed little time, energy, or enthusiasm for addressing matters related to student conduct. Moreover, while students became dissatisfied with the conventional rigors of academic life, they increasingly protested the
stringent forms of punishment and correction they endured. Over time, student became more interested in co-curricular endeavors, such as athletics, fraternities and sororities, literary societies, and other student organizations.

According to Long (2012), faculty participation in addressing and managing student behavior had substantially decreased by the turn of the 20th century. As a result, leaders of several Ivy League schools (such as Harvard) and many land-grant institutions (such as Iowa State University) selected the first “deans of men” (later “deans of students”) to review and adjudicate student behavior and administer university policies and procedures. In the early 1900s’, much of the customary tasks associated with the student affairs profession began to emerge. For example, staff were appointed to observe students’ academic records and provide career counseling to students. Some of the more prominent student affairs professional organizations, such as the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) and the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) were founded around this time.

These organizations provided an opportunity for professional staff, such as the deans of men and women (who worked in relative seclusion) to network, discuss issues, and share thoughts and opinions on student development. With the publication of The Student Personnel Point of View, a landmark report issued by the American Council on Education (ACE) in 1937, the core values of the student affairs profession were widely recognized and accepted in higher education. The report stressed the education of the entire student: intellectually, spiritually, and personally, and insisted that attention should be paid to each student's individual needs. In 1949, the report was revised and a comprehensive suite of student services representing 33 functional areas was proposed. The guidelines proposed in the Student Personnel Point of View provided
the philosophical and organizational basis the way student affairs operates on college and university campuses today.

In the 1960s, the legal relationship between students and higher education institutions changed considerably. The American judicial system significantly diminished the concept of *In loco parentis*. In 1961, the decision of the United States Supreme Court in Dixon vs. Alabama State Board of Education defined a person 18 years of age as a legal adult. In addition, the court’s ruling granted students the right to due process and considered the relationship between students and colleges and universities to be largely contractual; students would receive a college degree if they paid their tuition and met the published academic standards. As a direct result, student conduct was no longer the most critical aspect of the college student experience for the student affairs professional; instead, the critical purpose for student affairs personnel was to educate students on making smart, responsible, and appropriate choices and decisions.

According to Cepin (2015), 62 percent of the academic workforce in the United States are administrators of student affairs in colleges and universities.

*SSAOs’ and Fostering the Campus Ethical Climate*

The Senior Student Affairs Officer (SSAO) is the most senior-level student affairs administrator at their institution (National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, n.d.). The SSAO is tasked with an array of immense and wide-ranging roles and responsibilities. SSAOs’ are “responsible for the services and programs that create and maintain communities of common purpose based on shared vision, values, and commitment to excellence” (Dungy & Ellis, 2011, p. 3). Moreover, SSAOs are responsible for navigating their campus landscapes in an ever-changing global society; a society defined by varying legal and compliance mandates, parental assumptions, student ambiguity, and declining financial resources (Dungy & Ellis,
SSAOs must be, and remain, informed about the developmental and educational needs of students. They manage student affairs divisions comprised of several functional units, departments, and/or programs. While student affairs divisions do not consist of the exact same functional units from institution to institution, they often contain areas such as residence life, student conduct, counseling and behavioral health, student activities, and multicultural centers (Manning, Kinzie, & Schuh, 2014; Sponsler & Wesaw, 2014).

There is a myriad of opportunities for senior student affairs officers (SSAOs’) to positively contribute and shape the campus ethical climate. Johnson, Becker, Cummins, Estrada, Freeman, and Hall (2016) spoke to building healthy educational environments in which SSAOs’, as campus leaders, served as role models and established an ethical campus climate that was seen as open and transparent. While nearly every group or constituency on a college or university campus has an interest in promoting or fostering an ethical campus climate, SSAOs’ often lead efforts to examine, define, or improve the ethical campus climate that is often a component of the student experience outside the formal classroom setting (Banning, 1997; Brown, 1985; Fried, 1995). These experiences are usually covered through the following: 1) a presentation on core values either at new student orientation or through a first-year experience course, 2) an ethical decision-making workshop conducted by either a student conduct officer (as a sanction due to an adjudication of a student conduct violation) or by career development personnel in preparation for graduating seniors, and 3) workshops focused on anti-hazing and risk management for members of fraternities and sororities, student athletes, and other student organization leaders, and 4) regular review of student conduct policies and procedures.

However, given the significant increase in federal and state legislative mandates, senior student affairs officers (SSAOs’) must encounter and manage a campus setting in which the
courts interpret colleges and universities more and more as a commercial entity and students as consumers. However, according to Herdlein, Kretovics, Rossiter, and Sobczak (2011), viewing students in this manner does not correlate with an SSAO’s ability to foster and promote an ethical campus climate. In addition, this perception does not align with the formal education or professional experiences that many student affairs professionals encounter on their journey to becoming, or assuming the role as a SSAO (Reynolds, 2011, 2013).

*Student Life in Higher Education*

College students on today's campuses encounter a variety of complex situations for which they are often ill-prepared for by experience or individual development; their transition to college often comes with homesickness, which may lead to issues like weight loss/gain, substance abuse, depression, and sleep deprivation (just to name a few). The relationship between students' attitudes and values and the campus atmosphere that supports or challenges them stands as a dynamic dialectic of confirmation and rejection that affects the ethical positions and choices of both the individual student and the institution. The distinguishing landscape of the institutional ethos affects the values and interests established in the ethical campus climate and the overall effect of college life on the student (Bowen and Fincher, 2018). Issues facing colleges and universities across the country, including but not limited to sexism, racism, homophobia, academic integrity, and substance abuse (just to name a few) argue for the pursuit of an ethical campus setting that regularly asserts the significance of human dignity, promotes and cultivates growth and achievement, and insists on respect in interpersonal communication and engagement. While the work of student affairs divisions continues to change and grow as the needs and circumstances of their institutions evolve, one theme endures and remains a core value of student affairs work. According to Dalton and Crosby (2011), the one constant theme of
student affairs at colleges and universities is “…to provide services and programs that enhance the intellectual and ethical development of college students” (p. 6). This perspective regarding student affairs work at higher education institutions confirms the connection between students’ academic engagement and personal growth with their moral, virtuous development as ethically responsible individuals.

*Higher Education Leadership & Ethical Concerns*

Ethical problems arise in a wide range of situations, including how faculty, students, administrators, and other groups are treated by an institution’s leadership. Relations between the organization and its circle of external influence (i.e. - donors, alumni, non-profit and private grant providers, etc.) provide scope for conflicts of interest and other ethical dilemmas. Marketing practices and admission procedures can raise questions about honesty and fairness, while maintaining academic freedom can have legal and ethical implications. Ethical problems range from academic dishonesty to disclosure of public interest and race equality to information confidentiality.

According to Yukl (2006), leaders have a major impact on the survival of colleges and universities. They can make unethical conscious and unconscious choices. Yukl continues to indicate that leaders can distort organizational culture and influence other colleagues and employees to participate in unethical behavior consciously or unknowingly. Leadership at U.S. colleges and universities (i.e. – presidents, vice presidents, board of trustees, etc.) remain under pressure to react to societal issues resulting from shifts in the nation’s demographics that affect college enrollment (i.e. – more adults outside the traditional 18-24 age range), an increased use in technology in education, and economic and social forces that bring both potential disruption and/or opportunity.
Personal Journey to Becoming an SSAO

Assumptions and biases can have a great impact on a study’s discoveries (Saldana, 2015; Jones, Torres, and Arminio, 2013). In any research endeavor, the perspectives, needs, values, and beliefs of the researcher significantly influence the research being conducted. According to Bourke (2014), “our own biases shape the research process, serving as checkpoints along the way…through recognition of our biases, we presume to gain insights into how we might approach a research setting, members of particular groups, and how we might seek to engage with participants” (pg. 1).

I grew up a first-generation college student who was exposed to family members who fell victim to gang violence, joblessness, and substance abuse. While many of my peers in the 3rd grade wanted to become police officers, fire fighters, and professional athletes, I was one of the few who wanted to be an educator. My mother suffered from substance abuse, but successfully completed drug rehabilitation and obtained her GED. My father completed his high school diploma, and proceeded directly to the New York City Police Academy (spending his life in law enforcement). I am the textbook definition of a first-generation college student and was encouraged by high school mentors to leave the comfort zone in New York City, and proceed to upstate New York to attend college at SUNY Albany. Once I arrived at SUNY Albany, it took me some time to get adjusted to a new way of life. I remember having lunch one day in the Campus Center, and an older gentleman asked if he could sit down with me, and I said of course. We started a conversation about my personal background and family, my interest in SUNY Albany, my thoughts about my academic major, and my possible interest in getting involved with co-curricular activities in and around campus. When we finished our conversation, he shared with me that he was the Vice President for Student Affairs at SUNY Albany.
What started out as a casual lunchtime conversation turned into an opportunity for me to explore what college life had to offer. I became involved with the student government and was offered jobs as both a resident assistant and a campus center building manager. It was around this time that I fell in love with student affairs administration and vowed to pursue it as a professional vocation. In my junior year, while serving as a resident assistant, I was approached by the Director of Judicial Affairs to apply and serve as a member of the University Judicial Board. Serving in this capacity enabled me to have a voice in the SUNY Albany community, in addition to serving as a role model to my peers and underclassmen on what it means to be a responsible student at the University. These leadership positions allowed me to acquire substantial leadership experience, gain valuable interpersonal communication and critical thinking skills, and learn how to work with faculty, administrators, and other student leaders to apply the rules of due process while exercising sound judgment regarding alleged violations of the Code of Student Conduct. In addition, I also developed a working knowledge of institutional policies and procedures.

Because of my personal and professional interest in postsecondary education, I have a favorably strong bias toward the creation of an ethical campus climate. I have administered conduct proceedings, revised conduct codes, and facilitated workshops on ethical decision-making and the promotion of community standards. I believe that colleges and universities should prepare students to live and engage with integrity in value-driven experiences. Moreover, I consider senior student affairs officers as responsible stewards for the creation and maintenance of an ethical climate for students on their respective campuses, given their role as chief disciplinarian and their ability to teach students, outside the classroom, about what’s right and wrong.
Research Purpose

Given the problems of research and practice described above, this study filled significant scholarship and knowledge gaps related to the experiences of senior student affairs administrators. Specifically, the study explored how senior student affairs administrators perceive their role in fostering an ethical campus climate. As Guskey (2000) asserts, "one constant finding in the research literature is that notable improvements in education almost never take place in the absence of professional development" (p. 4). Therefore, this research identified practitioner learning experiences, motivations, and needs to uncover how campus leaders foster an ethical campus climate.

Research Questions

Through a qualitative lens, and rooted in the need for colleges and universities to foster an ethical climate for their campuses, this study was guided by the following research question:

- How do senior student affairs administrators (“SSAOs”) perceive their role in fostering an ethical climate on their campus?
- How do the perceptions of SSAOs’ regarding their role in fostering an ethical climate on college campuses influence their actions and behavior?

Theoretical Frameworks

The current study examines the role of senior student affairs officers in creating an ethical student climate. According to Camp (2001), substantive theories offer explanations in a restricted setting and are limited in scope, often being expressed as propositions or hypotheses. Substantive theories begin with a supportable premise, extending through a logical path of reported research (Creswell, 2002). Substantive theories are being used due to the exploratory nature of this study and the framework upon which the theoretical frameworks are constructed.
The theoretical frameworks used to guide this study are ethical climate (Victor and Cullen, 1988) and the theory of planned behavior (Azjen, 1985; 1991). Each of the following theories is further grounded in macro-level frameworks such as cognitive psychology, organizational management, sociology and moral philosophies, as discussed in the review of the literature.

Theory of Planned Behavior

According to Ajzen (1991), and reiterated by Reingle, Thombs, Osbom, Saffian and Oltersdor, (2010), the theory of planned behavior is a behavioral model, rooted in social psychology, and used to forecast and describe what encourages individuals to engage in certain behaviors. The theory of planned behavior originally stems from the theory of reasoned action, one of the three classic models of persuasion originated by Fishbein and Ajzen (1967). The theory of reasoned action proposed that an individual’s intention to engage in some type of behavior is swayed by the individual’s point of view toward the behavior and other social norms. For example, while I may be interested in waking up early, and set up an alarm to wake me up early, I could easily press the snooze button and remain sleeping (thus not waking up early as I originally intended). The theory of planned behavior, the extension of reasoned action, was built on the premise that to be able to clarify behavior, one must consider intention which is influenced by personal attitudes, subjective social norms, and perceived behavioral control. One example that the theory of planned behavior has been used within the college setting involves risky and excessive alcohol consumption (Collins & Carey, 2007; Collins, Witkiewitz, and Larimer, 2011).

In addition to personal demeanor, standards and perceptions are rooted in our perspectives regarding certain behaviors (Ajzen 1991, 1985). Ajzen’s (1991) statements
concerning the usefulness of the theory of planned behavior are particularly significant to this study:

“Intentions, perceptions of behavioral control, attitudes towards the behavior, and subjective norms each reveal a different aspect of the behavior, and each can serve as a point of attack in attempts to change it. The underlying foundation of beliefs provides the detailed description needed to gain substantial information about behavioral determinants. It is at the level of beliefs that we can learn about the unique factors that induce one person to engage in the behavior of interest and to prompt another to follow a different course of action (p. 206).

Many college graduates are not adequately prepared to think critically, solve and address problems, agree to take or accept responsibility, and understand and appreciate the perspective of others. In addition, college and university officials have failed to develop proactive strategies that would discourage students from engaging in this unethical behavior. Thus, it is conceivable to survive academically, remain enrolled, and graduate with a degree despite long-term patterns of substance abuse, which damage the formation of new memories and reduce both the ability and the willingness to learn. Moreover, colleges and universities should use this information to ensure an ethical campus climate that not only responds and addresses this behavior appropriately but promotes and fosters an intolerance of this type of behavior as soon as the student steps on campus.

An essential factor in the theory of planned behavior is the intent to engage in a given behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Intent showcases motivational factors that greatly influence behavior. The stronger the intent, the more likely the performance of the behavior, provided intent is assessed in relation to the behavior of interest and the context remains unchanged. Evidence
regarding the connection between intent and behavioral performance was collected in a great variety of decision-making scenarios (i.e., strategy choices, smoking marijuana, choosing among candidates in an upcoming election, and resident assistants referring students for counseling services (Servaty-Seib, Taub, Lee, Morris, Werden, Prieto-Welch, and Wachter Morris, 2013; Ajzen, 1988). Considering the role of resident assistants as referral agents for students in distress on college and university campuses, this study explored the connection between the beliefs of the resident assistants (i.e. – perceived behavioral control, subjective norms, and attitudes) and the performance of referring students in distress to counseling and therapy. The consequences of these actions are also pre-determinants for behavioral intent; for example, a student may consider not engaging in marijuana use on their campus if they think they may get caught by local law enforcement. Similarly, a resident assistant may choose not to refer a student for counseling services if this referral may damage the rapport built between the resident assistant and the concerned student. This research provided a good backdrop for this study as senior student affairs officers (SSAOs’) engage in similar scenarios and must determine the appropriate implementation/action on a variety of matters affecting the ethical campus climate.

Intention is an intricate notion with at least three elements (Ajzen, 1991): (a) individual attitude toward the behavior in question, (b) the subjective norm – perceived social pressure to perform or not perform the behavior, and (c) perceived behavioral control. A more favorable attitude in conjunction with a more auspicious subjective norm, together with greater perceived behavioral control, leads to stronger intent to engage in the behavior. Outcomes have shown that personal considerations – attitude and perceived behavioral control – tend to outshine the effect of social pressure. In addition, when a situation allows an individual to have broad control over behavior, intent can be portrayed as a precursor of behavior.
This theory holds that an individual's intention to engage, or not to engage, in a behavior is a precondition to any action (Shin and Kim, 2015; Terry and O’Leary, 1995). However, this intention can be manipulated over time and other obscuring factors, whether internal or external, that determine the individual's willingness to carry out the intention. Intentions are defined as the motivational aspects that signify the extent to which people are willing to go to engage in a behavior, thus the stronger the intention to engage in a behavior, the higher the possibility that an individual will carry out the behavior (Ajzen, 1991).

This study examined the underlying attitudes, beliefs, behavioral intention, and perceived behavioral control of senior student affairs officers using the theory of planned behavior. The theory of planned behavior predicts and explains human behavior (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). The theory of planned behavior is frequently used in quantitative research; however, Renz (2012) indicated, “it can be used as heuristic framework to guide questions to be raised in qualitative research” (pg. 40). This theory provided a good lens to explore how and why a senior student affairs officer performs a specific action, and why they engaged in said behavior (especially when it affects how they foster an ethical campus climate). There are pre-determinants that may affect some actions (i.e. – previous professional context, education, etc.) and external circumstances (i.e. – federal and state regulations, senior administrative hierarchy, etc.).

_Ethical Climate Theory_

Advanced and reported by Victor and Cullen (1988), ethical climate represents an eloquent plot of ethical decision-making and actions within an organization (Martin & Cullen, 2006). The theory, as depicted by Victor and Cullen (1988), builds upon Kohlberg’s (1984) theory of moral development, specifically the notions of a moral atmosphere and the just community. Moral atmosphere, as an idea, embodies “the prevailing norms of a specific group
and not only the individuals’ level of moral development” (Victor & Cullen, 1988, p. 103). Victor and Cullen perceived that Kohlberg’s understanding of moral development was too restricted, as it failed to acknowledge the work climate’s settings and surroundings. From my viewpoint, every climate is a sort of work atmosphere that is best perceived as a gathering of prescriptive environments reflecting hierarchical strategies, arrangements, and practices with good results and outcomes. For example, an organization that focuses on a positive ethical climate reduces incidences of sexual harassment, lessens retribution against those who confront and report sexual harassment, and promotes better psychological health and positive experiences among work colleagues (Buchanan, Settles, Hall, and O’Connor, 2014; Fitzgerald, Drasgow, Hulin, Gelfand, and Magley, 1997; Glomb, Richman, Hulin, Drasgow, Schneider, and Fitzgerald, 1997). Positive work climates emerge when individuals within the organization trust that specific standard operating procedures are in place for addressing unethical behavior (Cullen, Parboteeah, & Victor, 2003). With a positive ethical work environment, both employers and employees will avoid (and will not encounter) unethical behavior. However, when people focus solely on their self-interest and looking out for themselves, disregarding rules and policies in the process, unethical conduct becomes commonplace. This became the case at Penn State where Jerry Sandusky, the assistant football coach who was arrested for engaging in child sex abuse; several coaches and senior university administrators, including both the institution’s president and athletics director, were terminated for ignoring the unethical behavior and looking the other way.

Unfortunately, colleges and universities are not immune to ethical scandals. Campbell (1995) indicated that the ethical climates of non-profit organizations, including higher educational institutions, are being closely examined to determine what they are doing to prevent,
or reactively address and resolve, ethical scandals. In some cases, failing to address and resolve an ethics scandal could seriously cripple an institution of higher learning. This was the case with Morris Brown College, where several institutional leaders abused federal funds (which was supposed to be used for directly support student enrollment) to pay college personnel. This led to the criminal prosecution of both the institution’s president and financial aid director, and the removal of the college’s accreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS).

According to Blimling (1998), “cultivating character and intellect is the bedrock of American higher education” (pg. 69). College and universities around the globe are focusing more on their ethical responsibilities, which goes beyond their legal obligations (Sadlak & Ratajczak, 2004). The behavior of individual employees and the institutions as a whole is subject to moral principles. Higher education institutions should create ethical learning environments where very diverse students can learn the principles and traditions of professional practice, acquire and foster knowledge, and develop skills to help them become responsible citizens and ethical leaders (Couch & Dodd, 2005). Moral responsibilities, however, are much broader than this, as ethical issues are manifold and arise in a wide range of situations, including those related to the process of teaching and learning, research and development activities, but also links to the global society.

However, college and university leaders continue to encounter roadblocks that interfere with their ability to promote institutional values and ethical standards among all campus constituencies. These roadblocks can include but are not limited to the following: 1) controversial financial accounting practices (Bartem & Manning, 2001), 2) donor influence over admissions and/or athletic programs (Winston, 1999; Gladden and Mahony, 2005), 3) student
disrupting a faculty member during a class discussion (Clark, 2008; Pascarella and Terenzini, 1977), and 4) substance abuse and sexual violence in the residence halls (Wechsler, Lee, Kuo, Seibring, Nelson, and Lee, 2002; Armstrong, Hamilton, and Sweeney, 2006).

Since the senior student affairs administrator serves as the “moral conscience” (Creamer, Winston, and Miller, 2013, pg. 7) for the campus community, these issues will likely land on this individual’s desk for review and resolution. Senior student affairs administrators have a special obligation to the campus community to demonstrate respectable behavior and moral character. In addition, senior student affairs administrators must ensure that both internal constituents and external influences (i.e. – parents, donors, sponsors, etc.) to the campus community adhere to the moral, legal, and ethical expectations of the institution (Creamer, et al, 2013).

Definition of Terms

Ethical Climate: Victor and Cullen (1988) conceived the term ethical climate as “... general and pervasive characteristics of organizations, affecting a broad range of decisions...” (p. 102) that people use to determine if a decision is right or wrong. The ethical climate of an organization is described as the mutual approaches of what is virtuously appropriate and how unethical behavior should be addressed (Victor and Cullen, 1987).

Ethical Decision-Making: Ethical decision making can be defined as a choice or action taken, or not taken, as a result of an ethical dilemma or personal situation requiring a choice between right, or proper, and wrong, or improper (Karimu, 2012). Ethical decision making can encompass factors leading to a decision, such as temptations, emotional intelligence, moral situations, attitudes, beliefs, and omissions (DeYoung, Peterson, & Higgins, 2002).

Organization: According to Ackoff (1971), an organization is a system that contains at least two elements which have a common purpose, has a functional division of labor in pursuit of the
common purpose(s) of the elements that define it, the functionally distinct subsets (parts of the system) can respond to each other's behavior through observation or communication, and at least one subset of the system has a system-control function (pp. 669-670).

**Theory of Planned Behavior:** The theory, as described by both Armitage and Conner (2001) and Azjen (1991), stipulates that behavioral intent is the antecedent to behavioral performance (Ajzen, 1991), and has been widely used to explain variation in many health-related behaviors, such as smoking, smoking cessation, diet, and exercise, among others (Armitage & Conner, 2001).

**Chapter Summary and Overview of Remaining Chapters**

According to the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (“Middle States”) it is critical for colleges and universities to develop and sustain a campus climate that promotes honesty and integrity in all their dealings with students and other members of the campus community (www.msche.org). However, ethical issues continue to plague institutions of higher education across the country. Failing to create and maintain an ethical campus climate for college students can adversely impact both college and university life and society in general, perhaps in catastrophic ways. The characteristics, as indicated in scholarly literature about organizational ethical climate and the theory of planned behavior, may provide higher education institutions a transferable approach to be considered in their efforts to develop and maintain an ethical campus climate. The stakes in promoting and maintaining an ethical campus climate are equally as high as in other organizations and the implications are arguably more far-reaching than in any other industry.

The remainder of this dissertation is organized into four chapters, as well as a bibliography and appendices. Chapter Two presents a review of the related literature dealing
with the constructs of the theory of planned behavior, ethical climate in organizations, and ethics in higher education. Chapter Three delineates the research design and methodology of the study to address the problem and purpose identified in the introduction. The determination of the samples selected for study is described, and discussion focuses on the collection of data and the procedures followed. Chapter Four presents an analysis of the data and a discussion of the findings organized around the primary research questions. Chapter Five contains the overview of the study, summary of the key findings, and implications, as well as recommendations for further research.
Chapter 2 - Review of the Literature

Introduction

While researchers have noted the critical role colleges and universities play in creating an ethical climate, several authors highlight the important role institutions of higher education play not only in providing a foundation for the ethical development of their students, but also helping them grow into ethical leaders for both industry and society (Crowe, Lindsay, and Phillips, 2013; Dey, Antonaros, Ott, Barnhardt, and Holsapple, 2010; Weeger, 2007; Couch and Dodd, 2005). Although there is a substantial amount of scholarly literature available on ethics in higher education and student affairs (Chassey, 1999; Dannells, 1997; Kohlberg, 1971; Perry, 1970; Rest, 1986; Reynolds and Halx, 2008; Van Wingerden, Ellis, Pratt Jr, 2014), minimal research attention has been directed toward how college and university leaders, specifically those involved in managing student affairs administration, perceive their role in fostering an ethical campus climate. Previous studies have focused on the issues related to student misconduct (i.e., alcohol and substance abuse, physical and sexual violence, cheating and plagiarism, etc.), the creation and implementation of student conduct codes and academic honor creeds (Stoner, 2008; Zdziarski and Wood, 2008; Waryold, 2006, McCabe, Trevino, and Butterfield, 1999) and how ethics is incorporated into the academic curriculum (Berk, 2001; Berkowitz and Bier, 2007; Christie, 2005; Owens, 1998; Reyes, Kim, and Weaver, 2016).

This study is based on a review of the relevant literature primarily from the fields of business ethics, management, organization studies, and higher education. I began with a general search of several major online databases, available at a major U.S. private research institution. At the initial stage, I used various combinations and alternatives of keywords such as theory of reasoned action, theory of planned behavior, organizational culture, organizational ethics, ethical climate, higher education and student affairs.
Once I identified the initial set of relevant articles and other sources, the next step was to conduct what library and information science experts call “pearl growing” (Ramer, 2005). This method entails reviewing several fundamental articles to identify additional keywords, subject terms, or combinations of words, which were not considered initially, but were used in the relevant publications. This process allowed me to expand the array of research topics and publications for inclusion in the larger search. For example, the term “ethical climate” emerged as a concept used interchangeably with ethical culture in some cases. Therefore, I included this key word in newer searches.

*Student Affairs in Higher Education*

The vocation now referred to as student affairs in higher education is comprised of professional staff committed to supporting college students’ academic and personal development. Other similar names for this sector include student development, student services, and/or student success. Personnel who work in the student affairs arena have dedicated themselves to assisting students with an array of experiences related to their pursuit of higher education. In the late 19th century, colleges and universities began to focus on student development more intimately. Staff were hired exclusively to help supervise student activities, and to reduce paternalistic faculty’s burden of managing student behavior.

The first position charged with this sort of formal role was the “Dean of Men” or “Dean of Women.” During the colonial period in the United States, higher education institutions were residential, and these administrators lived alongside students in their dormitories. Their role was to enforce rules and order, while ensuring modesty and decorum. The philosophy the deans used to manage student conduct during this era was known as “in loco parentis”, which translates to “in place of parent.” The goal of these early student affairs practitioners was to serve as a
parental surrogate, assuming responsibility for the actions and achievements of the students in their care (Rhatigan, 2009).

The early to mid-1900s’ gave birth and rise to student affairs professional organizations, representing the standards and growing critical importance of student affairs administrators. In 1937, the American Council on Education published a guiding manuscript referred to as “The Student Personnel Point of View” (the document was updated and revised in 1949). As new college student psychological and developmental theories began to arise, the student affairs arena started to see a shift from “in loco parentis” to a more holistic view of student development in which the focus became the emotional, physical and mental health needs, rather than simply maintaining student conduct. Referred to as “the student development movement”, this perspective prospered in the 1960’s and focused on helping students master the ability to think critically, shape and define their identity, make meaning of their experiences. Student affairs personnel were there to assist students in reaching their full potential.

Also known as the G.I. Bill, The Servicemen's Readjustment Act, became federal law in 1944 and steered massive student enrollment in colleges and universities from the 1950s to the 1970s. The G.I. Bill was also instrumental in enhancing American universities' diversity (Thelin, 1996). With the increase in college and university enrollment, the growth of higher education institutions increased especially in administrative size and complexity. Given this growth surge in student enrollment, divisions of student affairs also grew larger and became more complex in the process. Out of this complexity emerged the role of the dean of students (Rhatigan, 2009).

In between the 1960s’ and 1990s’, college students significantly changed from clients to consumers. According to Geiger (2005), the role of the college student prior to the Civil Rights movement was that of a client who sought out the faculty’s proficiency and subject
familiarity. As the student affairs field began to grow between the 1960s’ and 1990s’, college students moved from being clients to customers. During the 1960s and 1970s, campus conditions changed along with major revisions to the institution’s curriculum, course participation processes, and testing procedures given the influence of student protestors (Geiger, 2005). In addition, as the market began to have a significantly greater impact on higher education, there was increased competition for the most able-minded students which greatly encouraged increased competition in the collegiate marketplace.

In the United States today, student affairs administrators comprise 62% of the academic labor force and make up the largest professional work group within colleges and universities (Cepin, 2015). An increased focus on student success has become vital and critical across the higher education landscape (Pucciarelli and Kaplan, 2016). Student affairs issues are among the most fundamental and far-reaching realities facing higher education. Student affairs officers often operated in a vacuum over the past decade, student affairs personnel are now active members of cross-functional teams; working collaboratively across colleges and universities to enhance the student academic and co-curricular experience.

Today's campus issues and challenges, including campus safety, critical crisis response, threat assessment, and the management of student mental health concerns, have contributed to the expansion of traditional student affairs administrative responsibilities (i.e. – residence life, leadership development, and programming/policies focused on diversity, inclusion, and student engagement). These issues have made the field of student affairs more complex and necessitated additional leadership within the institution’s chain of command by student affairs personnel. In general, faced with ever-changing demographics, new expectations and increased competition, colleges and universities should critically think about who, and how, they
serve. These changes make the perspectives of student affairs officers vitally critical of the institution’s service initiatives and strategic planning.

**Student Affairs and Campus Ethical Climate**

According to the International Association of Universities (IAU) ([http://www.iau-aiu.net](http://www.iau-aiu.net), n.d.), an affiliate of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) serving as a global voice for higher education, there is no charter document or cipher that focuses on ethical behavior in institutions of higher education that identify how these institutions address and prohibit acts of academic misconduct and advertise and encourage positive academic and social behavior. During their recent conference, participants decided to explore the workability of drafting a set of global protocols that considers ethical behavior at colleges and universities. The global community has become anxious and apprehensive with the rise in ethical scandals over the past twenty plus years, and attention is being paid towards colleges and universities to see how they respond and address these issues. Damon (2006) noted that the increased focus on ethical issues has prompted demand in the development of academic classes and co-curricular programs.

College and university administrators have long been concerned about ethical behavior on college and university campuses since the early part of the 19th century (Stimpson and Stimpson, 2008). The following is an examination of recent scholarly literature on the forms of misconduct that are typical on college and university campuses. Dannells (1991) conducted a study related to the trends campuses saw in student ethical misconduct, along with the variety of responses used by student conduct officers. The study gave rise to the concerns commonly reviewed and addressed by student conduct officers: substance abuse, gambling, sexual assault, theft and vandalism. This study conducted more than twenty years ago, acknowledged that the
increase in alcohol use stems from the change in the legal drinking age. Additionally, Dannells’ research examined how frequently a certain sanction was used during a conduct intervention and displayed an increase in the use of disciplinary probation over the measured 10-year span.

Swazey, Louis, and Anderson (as stated in Wingerden, Ellis, and Pratt, 2014) directed a national quantitative study, using survey information involving approximately 4,000 faculty and students enrolled at Carnegie-classified Research I institutions (a framework for grouping similar doctoral-granting institutions with high research output). The authors specifically discovered that faculty failed to substantially disclose their peers’ ethical misconduct. When reviewing participant responses, some faculty indicated that they were aware of peers who provided incorrect credit for class assignments or tests, and peers who abused institutional funding. Moreover, faculty respondents noted that their peers substantially disregarded rules and procedures related to academic integrity and sexual violence. While faculty and students substantially underreported the wrongdoing of other professors and students, more than half of the survey participants indicated that they were concerned about the potential for retaliation by both professors and students engaged in an act of misconduct.

Frederickson (1992) studied adjudicated students who engaged in reckless behavior and how they manipulated student conduct personnel, including hearing board panelists. Adjudicated students often attempt to negotiate the outcomes of conduct processes by establishing a verbal commitment to change or by exercising legal loopholes. When student conduct officers lessen behavioral outcomes, specifically in cases involving “impulsive” students, it gives the impression to the larger university/college community that the conduct was not contrary to institutional expectations for behavior. This can encourage misconduct from other students and can isolate the real functionality of the student conduct process – to help students learn and grow
from their mistakes. The author encouraged student affairs administrators to keep their emotions neutral when addressing and resolving behavior that is not only contrary to the community ideal, but also different from their own ethical and moral values.

One area of student ethical misconduct that has garnered significant attention over the years is the culture of cheating and academic dishonesty (Shrader, Ravenscroft, Kaufmann and West, 2012; Hudd, Apgar, Bronson and Lee, 2009; Simon, Carr, McCullough, Morgan, Oleson and Ressel, 2004; Newstead, Franklyn-Stokes and Armstead, 1996; McCabe & Bowers, 1994; Davis, Grover, Becker & McGregor, 1992; McCabe & Trevino, 1997). Newstead et al. (1996) have indicated that many college students engage in some form of academic dishonesty during their educational tenure. There is a substantial correlation between the perceived probability that a student has engaged in an act of academic dishonesty and the minimal number of instances of reported cases (McCabe and Trevino, 1993). A climate of academic misconduct may be tolerated given professors’ lack of reporting to their department chairs or academic deans. In addition, students perceived that their peers are engaging in cheating behavior, serving as their reason and purpose for engaging in this form of misconduct (Graham, Monday, O’Brien, Steffen, 1994). Students, rather than accept responsibility, often deny culpability and often attribute their misbehavior to their surroundings or specific circumstances (Wingerden, Ellis, and Pratt, 2014).

Proactive education is the vehicle commonly used to address academic integrity issues in an effort to impact and influence the campus culture (Hevel, Martin, Weeden, and Pascarella, 2015; Baetz, Zivcakova, Wood, Nosko, De Pasquale and Archer, 2011; Caldwell, 2010; Risacher and Slonaker, 1996). Colleges and universities who are committed to promoting academic integrity should widely distribute publications and encourage campus community leaders to promote these ideals (Reason, 2013; Arcelus, 2011; Gehring, Nuss, and Pavela, 1986). While
institutions of higher learning have an obligation to inform students about the pitfalls of academic dishonesty (Robertson, 2012; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh and Whitt, 2005; Kibler, 1993), colleges and universities fail to allocate financial and personnel resources to effectively address the ethical climate (Karkouti, 2015; Gayle, Tewarie, & White Jr, 2011; Roberts and Rabinowitz, 1992).

Guiding Principles for Student Affairs

The essential responsibility of all student affairs professionals is to be informed of the existing ethical standards and to assess their actions in relation to those values (James and Estanek, 2013; Winston and Saunders, 1991). The American College Personnel Association (ACPA) and the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) worked collaboratively to develop, “Seven Principles for Good Practice for Student Affairs” (1996). These values were designed to mold the student affairs landscape on college and university campuses, in addition to the functions and duties of these administrators. While there were six (6) principles outlined in total, the one most prevalent to this study is as follows: “Good practice in student affairs helps students to develop coherent values and ethical standards. Students are challenged to identify, examine, and construct meaningful values for a life of learning and responsible citizenship” (Blimling and Whitt, 1999).

Kitchener (1985) identified five principles to guide student affairs personnel and their ethical decision-making. The American College Personnel Association (ACPA) adopted these principles in 1989 to help student affairs personnel appropriately administer the ethical climate (Winston & Saunders, 1991). Kitchener's principles include the following:
1. Respect Autonomy - student affairs administrators should respect the choices, opinions, and rights of others. This respect does not necessarily imply agreement with the choices and opinions of others.

2. Do No Harm - student affairs administrators should refrain from potentially dangerous or harmful activities. The administrator should determine whether or not the rewards outweigh the risks.

3. Benefit Others - student affairs administrators should assist students in their development and maturation.

4. Be Just - student affairs administrators should treat every student and group fairly and equally.

5. Be Faithful - student affairs administrators should honor their agreements and be truthful and trustworthy in carrying out their duties.

Kitchener’s model of ethical decision making was used to test its applicability in addressing ethical dilemmas faced by student conduct administrators (Dowd, 2012). Categorical grouping of ethical dilemmas fit well under Kitchener’s principles, particularly justice. Student conduct administrators indicated that they typically depend on their professional code of ethics, personal values, cultural perspectives, institutional mission, and legal ramifications to address these dilemmas. There was a noteworthy connection between the degree of administrators’ knowledge of ethical theories and frequency of use. In addition, only five percent of these administrators received “very extensive” ethical training in graduate and/or professional school.

Janosik, Creamer, and Humphrey (2004) conducted an analysis of ethical problems encountered by student affairs administrators. Approximately 580 moral issues were encountered by over 300 student affairs administrators and were analyzed using Kitchener's
ethical principles. Reports of these issues varied when considering sexual orientation, level of involvement, and regulatory level inside the institution. For instance, female respondents announced a more prominent than anticipated number of moral issues concerning non-malfeasance than did male respondents. It might have been that female respondents were both propositioned by and frequently harassed in their work environments more frequently than men. Issues related to non-malfeasance in this study frequently included inappropriate, yet intimate, relationships and sexual encounters where substance abuse was involved. These issues are significant, evident and relevant on college campuses today due to the federal government’s enforcement and interpretation of Title IX (the federal civil rights law prohibiting sex discrimination in both employment and educational activities), and various state laws related to sex discrimination (Grimmett, Lewis, Schuster, Sokolove, Swinton, and Van Brunt, 2015).

**Senior Student Affairs Officers**

According to Smith and Hughey (2006), divisions of student affairs are gaining value, support, and influence on college and university campuses across the country. Garland and Grace (1993) indicated that the student affairs division’s role is evolving and becoming central to their institutions being able to reach its goals and develop its students. Dr. Arthur Sandeen, a preeminent scholar of higher education and student affairs administration, wrote the seminal book on the responsibilities of senior student affairs officers. Sandeen (1991) noted that a senior student affairs administrator is an individual who manages and oversees the various programs, policies, and services for students that support both the academic and co-curricular aims of higher education (1991). It is well documented the important role of student affairs in student life at colleges and universities (Feldman and Newcomb, 1969; Astin, 1973; Pascarella and
The role of the senior student affairs officer is central to the identity and future direction of student affairs practice (Sandeen, 1991; Randall and Globetti, 1992). The senior student affairs officer needs to be able to network within and across their institutions to support their division’s priorities and initiatives (Sandeen, 1991). The senior student affairs officer not only leads the implementation of campus programs (Rogers, 1996), they educate students and provide guidance for the departments managed within their division (Smith, Lara, and Hugley, 2009). The senior student affairs officer advances and implements strategic plans consistent with the institution’s mission, collaborates with other division heads, acquires and allots financial resources that position the division to achieve this vision, and regularly monitors and assesses the division. With the exception of Sandeen’s *The Chief Student Affairs Officer* (1991), there is very little empirical research on the senior student affairs officer. References to the SSAO’s role in institutional leadership, responsibilities, and administrative functions are typically ancillary and parenthetical in most of the literature. In addition, while the scholarly literature is instructive collectively, it is dated and blurred.

From 1865-1920, the role's historical evolution is charted. The role's historical background is linked to a multitude of social and institutional factors that influenced the development and appointment of the first dean of students, starting with the following: 1) mixed-sex education in 1837, 2) the admission of students of color in 1835, and 3) the passage of Morrill Land Grant Act in 1862 (with revisions in 1864), changed the nature and complexity of interactions between students and faculty. As a result, Harvard University hired Dr. LeBaron Russell Briggs as the first recorded dean of men at Harvard University in 1890. The role was
originally intended to relieve the faculty of housing maintenance, facility management, student activities, medical and mental health services, career development, student conduct, and advising student organizations (Dinniman, 1977; Clement and Rickard, 1992). According to Dinniman (1977), following both Russia and United States’ space expeditions and the country’s participation in World War I and II and the Vietnam War, American higher education saw a significant increase in college student enrollment. As a direct result, the expansion of student support services expanded the SSAO’s leadership capacity.

The umbrella label of senior student affairs officer encompasses several other titles, including but not limited to, the senior student affairs officer, and associate and/or assistant vice presidents of student affairs, and dean of students (student services and/or campus life). At some institutions of higher learning, the dean of students is considered a senior-level position within both the student affairs organization and the institutional leadership. Patterson (1987) identified five traits senior student affairs administrators should possess: 1) a doctorate in higher education or student personnel administration, 2) significant experience (five years or more) in student affairs administration, 3) membership in one or more professional student affairs organizations (such as NASPA or ACPA), 4) a record of program presentations at professional meetings and conferences, and 5) a record of professional scholarly publications.

Randall and Globetti (1992) and Johnson and O’Grady (2006) noted that college and university presidents want senior student affairs officers to have both personal and interpersonal skills within their broader array of professional competencies. In particular, college and university presidents are recruiting SSAOs’ that possess the following professional competencies: 1) conflict resolution, 2) honesty and integrity, 3) determination, and 4) enthusiasm. Moreover, college and university presidents also seek SSAOs’ that support that
academic mission of the institution (Johnson & O’Grady, 2006), and who can serve as both educator and advocate for students (Sandeen, 1991). Townsend and Wiese (1992) found that individuals desiring to move into a senior administrative capacity in student affairs should have a terminal degree due to the increasing complexity of student affairs administration. According to Kelly (2005), “the challenge for senior student affairs administrators is to decide which decisions reflect core ethical values that cannot be compromised” (p. 40).

Theoretical Foundation of Ethics

Many consider Aristotle as the inspiration for laying the foundation of Western intellectual thought and providing another lens for comprehending the practical underpinnings of leadership. He is considered the author of a scientific method that has become the vehicle for both medieval Christian and Islamic pedagogy (Ciulla, 1998). Western culture was thought to be Aristotelian up until the conclusion of the 17th century. Concepts and ideas originally promoted by Aristotle appear to have remained rooted in modern Western thought. Ciulla noted that the present-day administrative model for today’s code of ethics was influenced by Aristotle. The Greek philosopher believed that ethics and politics were intertwined; for example, he believed that the ethical behavior of individuals should be examined within the context of collective ethical behavior since people live among and within groups. According to Latane (1981), this concept correlates to the group think mentality that occurs within organizational culture and the resulting social norms that stem from what is both tolerated and accepted by the group. It was Aristotle’s belief that the behavior of a group manifested the qualities of honesty, rationality, and character in judgment that are fundamental to ethical codes of conduct (Ciulla, 1998). He believed that everything in life and in space had a purpose or objective, including human action. He insisted that every act was intended for something positive. In addition, he asserted that if an
act is not chosen for the sake of something positive, that it would evolve into an endless movement resulting in the act being meaningless and unsuccessful.

This provides a good foundation for senior student affairs officers who are responsible for collaborating with others in and around the campus community to help students develop a good moral compass and ethical standards. This also provides a snapshot into the most common ethical dilemmas challenging senior student affairs officers, given their charge for balancing the sometimes-conflicting responsibility of serving students' needs while serving their institution's interests and requirements. For example, typically higher education institutions have strict alcohol consumption policies; most campuses also have alcohol and drug education programs to discourage substance abuse of students and their inappropriate behavior. However, these policies are ignored at many home athletic competitions games (such as Division-I college football games).

**Ethical Climate**

Victor and Cullen (1988) conceived the term ethical climate as “... general and pervasive characteristics of organizations, affecting a broad range of decisions...” (p. 101) that people use to determine if a decision is right or wrong. The term ethical climate described an employee's perspective regarding the institution's standard operating policies and procedures that were balanced and intellectually thoughtful (Al-Omari, 2013; Wimbush, Shepard, and Markham, 1997). Organizational ethical climate is sometimes interchangeably used with the term organizational ethical culture (Semradova and Hubackova, 2015; Reichers and Schneider, 1990), which is often defined as mutual group and individual orientation that are acquired through collective occurrences and recurrent social interactions over time (Patterson, West, Shackleton, Dawson, Lawthom, Maitlis, Robinson, and Wallace, 2005; Wilcox and Ebbs, 1992). However,
unlike culture, which is normally associated with values, norms, and beliefs (Rajeev, 2012), climate is characterized as perceived behavior towards particular features of organizational behavior such as safety and service (Domino, Wingreen, and Blanton, 2015; Mumford and Helton, 2000; Schneider, 2000). Researchers have found that organizations with clear ethical norms and strong ethical climates report fewer serious ethical problems and are more likely to deal with ethical issues when they arise, compared with organizations that have weaker ethical climates (Al-Omari, 2013; Schwartz, 2013; Bartels, Harrick, Martell, & Strickland, 1998).

As Couch and Dodd (2005) noted, higher education institutions have been strongly encouraged to engage in the promotion of ethics, ethical values and principles, and ethics education for over the past 40 years. Former Harvard University president, Dr. Derek Bok, advised colleges and universities to return to an era when ethical and moral development were critical components of the academic curriculum (Bok, 1982). While many higher education institutions have implemented codes of conduct to manage and address faculty (including research misconduct), staff and student behavior, these aspects mostly focus on policy and compliance. However, the challenges colleges and universities encountered almost 40 years ago in terms of managing an ethical campus climate (Astin, 1979) continue to remain presently (McKiernan & Birtwistle, 2010). While there have been studies focused on both the implementation and effectiveness of academic integrity policies (Austin and Brown, 1999; Cole and McCabe, 1996) and conduct codes (Dannells, 1997), there are also challenges with ethical teaching practices (Lyons, 1990; Macfarlane, 2004), business transactions (Bowie, 1991; De George, 1987), and ethical college and university leadership (Sama and Shoaf, 2008).

Christensen (1988b) stated, "applying humanistic values such as caring, autonomy, equality, and connectedness creates a more ethical organizational climate" (p. 47). Huhtala,
Kangas, Lämsä, and Feldt (2013) and White and Wallace (1988) defined an ethical climate as the practices or conditions that contribute to ethical organizational choices. Victor and Cullen (1988) defined ethical climate as "the prevailing perceptions of typical organizational practices and procedures that have ethical content" (p. 101). Al-Omari (2013) and Schulte (2001) defined the ethical climate of a university as the interactions of students with peers, faculty, and with their adviser according to a framework using the ethical principles of beneficence, non-maleficence, and respect for autonomy, justice, and fidelity. Ethical climates can be created (Guerci, Radaelli, Siletti, Stefano, Cirella, Shani, 2015; Stoner, 1989; Christensen, 1988a, 1988b), fostered (Bobek, Hageman, and Radtke, 2015; Vitell & Davis, 1990) and managed (Al-Omari, 2013; Luo and Lee, 2013; Kram, Yeager, & Reed, 1989). Ethical climate influences the behavior and job satisfaction of organizational members, both managers and non-managers (Demirtas and Akdogan, 2015; Shin, 2012; Vitell & Davis, 1990; Victor & Cullen, 1987). These various frameworks are documented as guidance for managing the practice of student affairs provided by the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA), the American College Personnel Association (ACPA), and the Council on the Advancement of Standards (CAS); however, these documents are not typically reviewed or incorporated into the curriculum of higher education graduate programs.

According to Shrader, Ravenscroft, Kaufmann, and West (2012), “ethical climate is one of the most widely studied phenomena...” (p. 108). The subject has received significant attention from academic scholars (Al-Omari, 2013); one of the seminal studies conducted on this subject by Victor and Cullen (1987, 1988), known as the “fathers of ethical climate” (Mayer, Kuenzi, and Greenbaum, 2010, p. 183). In their seminal work, Victor and Cullen discuss three primary assumptions of ethical climate. First, organizations (or sub-groups within organizations)
establish regulated normative systems. Second, these normative systems can be observed by members of an organization. Lastly, there is a difference between how organizational members perceive the ethical climate and the non-cognitive reactions to the ethical climate. These three inferences led to the following hypotheses: 1) There is more between, than within, group deviation (across organizations) on perceptions of ethical climate and, 2) insights and assumptions of the ethical climate may not associate with affective responses to the climate (Martin & Cullen, 2006). These hypotheses lay the foundation for the operationalization and ensuing empirical investigation of the ethical climate theory (Martin and Cullen, 2006; Victor and Cullen, 1987, 1988).

According to Mayer et. al., (2010), the seminal work produced by Victor and Cullen have stimulated more than 70 scholarly publications over the last two decades. Ever since ethical climate theory was first suggested by Victor and Cullen, it has provided beneficial, increasing information on an assortment of organizational outcomes such as bullying in the workplace, organizational commitment, ethical misconduct, employment fulfillment, and intentions to employee departure. Victor and Cullen argued that ethical climate can be defined according to the benchmark employees use to endorse moral and ethical decisions. In their first study (based on employee responses from four industrial firms involving 872 workers across four firms), Victor and Cullen contend that ethical climate is multidimensional and consist of five scales that include the following: caring (i.e. keeping an eye out for the well-being of others), law and code (i.e. cooperation and abidance with the legal and professional regulations), rules (i.e. compliance with established norms of an organization), instrumental (i.e. principled self-interest), and independence (i.e. personal ethics and the ability to make decisions). According to Shrader et. al (2012), other studies have examined Victor and Cullen's climate types and determined that one
organization's climate are connected with self-interest while benevolent climates are connected with conduct exhibiting attention towards moral acumen.

Trevino (1986) proposed a person-specific interactionist model of ethical decision-making in organizations and contended that decision-making can be explained in terms of an interaction between moral cognition based on Kohlberg's (1981, 1976, 1973) stages of cognitive moral development and organizational variables. In Trevino's model, she argued that cultural influences within an organization (e.g., collective norms, referent others, obedience to authority, and responsibility for consequences) could pacify the relationship between mental comprehension and behavior (so that when the culture of an organization is anemic, the association between the respective stage of cognitive moral development and ethical behavior should be clear and apparent). In addition, the culture within the organization can provide a unified set of norms that can steer an individual's behavior.

Barnett and Vaicys (2000) discovered this synergy and noted that organizational climate did not directly affect individual conduct but served as a corollary between ethical awareness and individual conduct. Specifically, when the organization's ethical climate was perceived as weak, and as ethical awareness increased, unethical behavior decreased. Conversely, when an organization's ethical climate was perceived positively, the association between ethical awareness and unethical conduct was inconsequential. According to Webb (2014), “to lower rates of observed misconduct, higher rates of reporting misconduct to leadership, reduced pressure to compromise standards, greater satisfaction with management's response to misconduct, greater satisfaction to the organization as a whole, lowered exposure to situations involving misconduct, and an increased sense of preparedness to handle situations inviting misconduct” (pg. 37).
The ethical climate of an organization is described as the mutual approaches of what is virtuously appropriate and how unethical behavior should be addressed (Zhang and Zhang, 2016; Peterson, 2002; Victor and Cullen, 1987). Creating an ethical climate is critical and has been examined in the scholarly literature in business (Marble and Kracher, 2012; Wimbush and Shepard, 1994; Kram, Yeager, & Reed, 1989; Fleming, 1987), in education (Shapira–Lishchinsky and Rosenblatt, 2010; Schulte, Brown, & Wise, 1991) and in nursing (Christensen, 1988a, 1988b; Davis, 1983; Benjamin, 1992; Vanlaere & Gastmans, 2007; Fry, 2008). Tools to measure ethical climate in business (Mayer, Kuenzi, and Greenbaum, 2009; Waring, 2004; Cullen, Victor, & Bronson, 1993; Cullen, Victor, & Stephens, 1989; Victor & Cullen, 1987, 1988), in educational settings (Lawter, Rua, and Chun, 2014; Cohen, 2006; Luthar, DiBattista, and Gautschi, 1997; Wilcox and Ebbs, 1992), and in various service organizations (Wallace & White, 1988; White & Wallace, 1988) have been developed and used in research. When organizational climate is viewed as a personal characteristic, it is assumed that members of an organization formulate their own views or perceptions of their surroundings. Therefore, how members of an organization comprehend their surroundings is considered more relevant than how others choose to portray it. Another perspective sees climate as an attribute of both individual members of the organization and the organization as a whole (Johnston, Sharma, and Spinks, 2013; Puttee, Vitale, and Laing, 2011; Ashforth, 1985; Schneider and Reichers, 1983). From this perspective, both individual differences in perception, as well as shared perceptions of organizational ethical climate, are recognized.

The dominant approach conceptualizes ethical climate as employees’ shared perceptions of organizational events, practices, and procedures. These perceptions are assumed to be primarily descriptive rather than affective or evaluative (Metzler, 2005; Schneider & Reichers,
1983). Other scholarly work contradicts this view, suggesting strong evaluative or affective components (Patterson, Warr, & West, 2004). At the individual level of analysis, referred to as psychological climate (James & Jones, 1974), these perceptions represent how work environments are cognitively appraised and represented in terms of their meaning to, and significance for, individual members in organizations (Arnaud, 2006; Patterson, West, Shackleton, Dawson, Lawthom, Maitlis, Robinson, and Wallace, 2005; James and Sells, 1981; James & Jones, 1974).

Most empirical studies have used an aggregate unit of analysis, such as the work group (Silen, Kjellstrom, Christensson, Lennart, Sidevall, and Svantesson, 2012), department (Deconinck, 2010), or organization (Deshpande, Joseph, and Shu, 2011). Such organizational ethical climates have been operationally constructed by aggregating individual scores to the appropriate level and using the mean to represent climate at that level. The rationale behind aggregating individual data to a unit level is the assumption that organizational collectives have their own climate and that these can be identified through the demonstration of significant differences in climate between units and significant agreement in perceptions within units (James, 1982). Perceptual agreement implies a shared assignment of psychological meaning allowing individual perceptions to be aggregated and treated as a higher-level construct. Much of the research on organizational ethical climate is now focused on aggregate rather than on psychological (Schneider, Bowen, Ehrhart, & Holcombe, 2000).

The features associated with an organizational ethical climate are the defining attributes that frequently emerge in the scholarly literature, thereby serving to discern it from related concepts by identifying details associated with an organizational ethical climate (Walker & Avant, 1988). Organizational ethical climate is about insight and awareness on an individual
Another feature of an organizational ethical climate is its role as an instrument that drives institutional decisions that impinge upon other people (Victor & Cullen, 1988). Third, organizational ethical climate is not stagnant, but a relatively lasting and evolving characteristic of an organization. A change in perception of organizational ethical climate can occur if there is change in leadership, especially if new leadership produces changes in the mission and values across the organization.

The primary precursors of an ethical climate are those organizational features that were steered to its present-day configuration. Consequently, the ethical climate of an organization is influenced by the entity’s history, mission and vision, formal systems and structures, and institutional standards (Hoekstra and Kaptein, 2012; Shadnam and Lawrence, 2011). The perception of the ethical organizational climate by members of an organization can be influenced by the standard operating procedures and policies (which can impact employees’ choices), the institutional standards that delineate and define matters of right and wrong, and the design and implementation of system benefits (Simha and Cullen, 2012; Ambrose, Arnaud, and Schminke, 2008; Ford and Richardson, 1994). Various managerial methods also have an influence on the perceived ethical organizational climate (Vitell and Davis, 1990; Fleming, 1987). Walker and Avant (1988) noted that the results of an ethical organizational climate are the aftermath or actions that occur because of the phenomena. The aftermath or actions may consist of employee’s happiness with and commitment to their work, their fit in and around the organization, and ethical confidence (Vitell and Singhapakdi, 2007; Vitell and Davis, 1990).

Scholars have explored how organizational ethical climate is formed and shaped by several organization and department types (Mayer, Kuenzi, and Greenbaum, 2010). Researchers have discovered that ethical climates prevailed in some department types, noting that the ethical
climate may be influenced by the department’s configuration (Wimbush, Shepard, and Markham, 1997). Though there were subsequent studies that explored organizational department type and ethical climate, the scholars discovered that the larger organizational ethical climate’s stature can influence a department’s ethical microclimate (Weber & Seger, 2002; Weber, 1995).

Additional scholarly inquiry explored the detailed organizational features related to the incorporation and administration of a code of ethics, and organizational innovation. Researchers discovered that entities that appropriately applied their code of ethics saw more positive ethical climates (Schwepker and Hartline, 2005). Neubaum, Mitchell, and Schminke (2004) explored organizational innovation and noted a strong association between the moral development of leaders and the organizational ethical climate within newer organizations. Additionally, these researchers discovered that these newer organizations also identify more with the following three types of work climates: instrumental, caring, and law and codes (Moore, 2012).

Based on information regarding how organizational ethical climate is perceived, interventions to manage or to change it can be implemented. In some cases, campaigns focused on civic engagement and exploration through the academic curriculum have been recently implemented (Lounsbury and Pollack, 2001; Ostrander, 2004); however, it is implemented on a limited scale given the lack of financial and personnel resources. Additionally, with calls to prompt effective cooperation and collaboration between academic and student affairs (with a focus on improving graduation rates and career attainment), this places prime opportunity for senior student affairs officers to step up and engage in other proactive and intervention strategies. The distinction between organizational ethical climate, organizational ethical culture, and ethical work environment, as discussed in the scholarly literature (Huang, You, Tsai, 2012; Kuenzi and Schminke, 2009; Erben and Guneser, 2008; Kaptein, 2008), seems to be somewhat vague, as the
terms were used interchangeably. The most frequently used surrogate terms for organizational ethical climate, or ethical climate, include the terms moral climate (Nystrom, 1990), corporate ethical climate (Fleming, 1987; Victor & Cullen, 1988), ethical work climate (Randall & Gibson, 1991), ethical environment (Vitell & Davis, 1990), ethical or moral culture or corporate culture (Fleming, 1987), the ethical dimension in the corporate context or of management (Kram et al., 1989), and the ethical dimension of the organization culture (Cullen et al., 1989). Terms such as ethical climate, ethical culture or ethical environment were often used to refer to the same phenomenon. This study focused on how university leaders perceive their role in fostering an ethical campus climate.

Exploring the Measures of Organizational Ethical Climate

Halpin and Croft (1963) were among the first scholars to investigate the construct of an organizational climate in schools. Halpin and Croft devised the Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire to explore employee and leadership behaviors among elementary school personnel. Halpin and Croft note that that organizational behavior is gauged by the employees’ account of the organization’s internal features and their perception of the organization’s overall operation. Ebrahimi and Mohamadkhani (2014) described the school climate as the personality of the school. The questionnaire, consisting of 32 questions related to eight dimensions of organizational climate, focused on 1) community spirit, 2) confusion and disorder, 3) interest, 4) adherence, 5) regard for others, 5) evasion, 6) influence, 7) internal dynamics, and 8) emphasis on production. The outcome of the study discovered that there was no significant correlation between job involvement and the organizational climate dimensions of consideration, hinderance, intimacy, and spirit; however, there was a significant relationship between employee engagement, detachment, and productivity. Alavi and Jahandari (2005)
conducted a similar study, utilizing the questionnaire from Halpin and Croft (1963), but analyzing university staff in Iran. The outcome of this study demonstrated that the university’s organizational climate was significantly similar to the ethical climate model described by Halpin and Croft than their anticipated campus climate.

The next instrument, the Organizational Climate Questionnaire, created by George Litwin and Robert Stringer (1968) was used to assess employee ambition and organizational climate. Rooted in achievement motivation theory (McClelland, Atkinson, Clark, and Lowell, 1953), the questionnaire measures the climate for the purposes of articulating needs for power, achievement, and association. Litwin and Stringer stipulated that the essence of an organization is implied only as it is perceived by members of the organization (Forte, 2011). Litwin and Stringer described, in practical terms, organizational climate as the totality of employee perceptions. Climate may positively or adversely affect organizational choices by making certain assumptions the types of outcomes that will occur from different activities (Kanten and Ulker, 2013). It should be noted that Litwin’s work extends beyond this questionnaire, having worked with Warner Burke to develop the Burke-Litwin Model (1992), used to assess the organizational change process.

The Organizational Climate Measure, based upon Quinn and Rohrbough’s Competing Values Model (1983), provided a multidimensional tool for gauging organizational climate. A sample of 6,756 employees, across 55 manufacturing organizations, completed the questionnaire. The 17 scales controlled within the measure had satisfactory levels of reliability and were contradictory. Concurrent validity was measured by comparing employees’ evaluations with managers’ and interviewers’ accounts of organizational features and managerial practices. Moreover, the measurement tool effectively distinguished between organizations, demonstrating
virtuous discriminant validity. The method offered scholars a comparatively inclusive and malleable measure to the assessment of organizational members’ experience. This tool has helped institutions of higher learning explore innovation (Zhang, Larkin, and Lucey, 2017), its organizational effectiveness (Kleijnen, Dolmans, Willems, and Van Hout, 2014); institutional assessment (Pounder, 2000), and job satisfaction (Trivellas and Dargenidou, 2009).

Victor and Cullen (1988, 1987) were among the first scholars to investigate organizational ethical climate as a theoretical construct, and the tool they developed is the most commonly used research instrument to explore the concept (Mayer, Kuenzi, & Greenbaum, 2009; Martin & Cullen, 2006; Peterson, 2002; Fritzsche, 2000). During their initial inquiry, Victor and Cullen generated a questionnaire which was administered to four different classes of employees (faculty, general managers, military enlistees, and trucking managers). The questionnaire was rooted in Kohlberg's (1981, 1976, 1973) theory of cognitive moral development; Victor and Cullen elevated the theory to an aggregate level of analysis, helping an organization's leaders determining the prevailing level of moral judgment. Through a factor analysis, Victor and Cullen identified six different types of ethical climates: 1) caring, 2) rules, 3) professionalism, 4) independence, 5) instrumental, and 6) efficiency. The outcomes showed that the faculty group had the highest scores on independence and, along with trucking managers, were most caring whereas military enlistees scored highest on the rules-oriented climate. Although the ethical climates studied were strong and provided substantial disparity and distinction among the groups, Victor and Cullen (1987) suggested that one dominant type of ethical climate exists in most organizations. A follow-up study provided further evidence of the ethical climates, although only five types of climates were discovered and did not include or identify professionalism as a climate type (Victor & Cullen, 1988).
Wimbush (1991) conducted a similar investigation, stemming from the work of Victor and Cullen (1988, 1987) exploring the connection between five ethical climates (caring, service, law and code, independence, and instrumental) and four behaviors (lying, stealing, insubordination, and being an accomplice to a crime). Wimbush assumed that some ethical climate types support specific ethical behavior. He postulated that a majority of these climate types (with the exception of instrumental) would stimulate ethical conduct because these climates are more focused on employees’ interaction, engagement, health and welfare. Conversely, Wimbush considered that unethical behavior would evolve and grow within an instrumental ethical climate, as this encouraged the employee’s primary focus on personal advancement and egotism. In addition, the author noted that managers exercised significant influence over their employees’ ethical conduct. Not only did Wimbush’s (1991) research support the conclusions highlighted by Victor and Cullen, it also reinforced the theoretical paradigm of organizational ethical climate.

Another study, conducted by Schulte (2001), measured the perceptions of the ethical climate for graduate and professional students at a large mid-western university. The study’s intent was to advance and authenticate the Ethical Climate Index and to establish that the tool could be used to measure the ethical climate of one school’s graduate and professional academic offerings. The outcomes of the study noted a significant difference in the participants’ insights on the campus ethical climate across educational disciplines. In addition, the participants’ scores on the assessment were positively associated with the College and Environment Scales (CUES) community scale (Pace, 1969, 1962). Schulte (2001) determined, given the outcomes of this inquiry, that students perceived the campus ethical climate differently depending on their academic major.
One angle used to explore and measure organizational ethical climate on a college campus involved the use of the Values Audit (Wilcox and Ebbs, 1992). The technique was focused on measuring ethical behavior and institutional standards, and helped colleges and universities comprehend the contrasting perspectives between the institution’s objectives and the perceived methods used by members of the campus community. The audit, according to Wilcox and Ebbs, “systematically assess(es) beliefs, goals, standards of choice and the manner in which they are lived or enacted; it also helps formulate recommendations according to the values proclaimed and practiced” (p. 255). The audit was issued to participants at colleges and universities, and the outcomes supported the use of the tool for advancing the concept of ethical awareness among campus constituents.

Subsequently, a study conducted by Bellows (1994), explored how faculty perceived the organizational ethical climate by examining certain institution attributes such as type of institution, academic concentration, and professorial classification (i.e. – adjunct, assistant, associate, or full professor). Bellows explored student engagement, along with the academic and administrative surroundings at two different types of postsecondary institutions. She discovered that there was significant disparity among those institutions examined regarding faculty insights about the organizational ethical climate and their respective ethical instruction.

Another tool developed by White and Wallace (1988), the Integrity Audit, was created to explore organizational ethical climate. After gathering and sorting through real case studies capturing organizational ethical challenges, leading authorities on the subject of business ethics examined ten cases to detect the common features that assisted in addressing these ethical conflicts. The authors worked with other leading authorities on the subject of organizational ethics who helped narrow down the common characteristics to 40 themes. While there were
several iterations of the audit drafted and revised, the first adaptation was provided to more than 1,500 employees in more than 10 organizations. After reviewing the outcomes of this assessment using a principal components analysis, six habits were recognized and selected and include resolving ethical conflicts thoughtfully, exhibiting honest behavior, and promoting the purpose and direction of the organization. The third adaptation of the assessment included a 4-point Likert scale used to measure the occurrence of tangible organizational habits.

The second adaptation of the Integrity Audit was completed by 140 educators and was used to explore both the ethical culture and leadership at several public middle schools (Nolan, 1992). After a quantitative analysis, Nolan determined that there was a substantial relationship between the ethical climate of the middle school and the leadership habits demonstrated by the principal. While the audit established a consistent correlation among all sample schools within the study regarding ideal practices, the audit did distinguish amongst those institutions in relation to actual organizational practices. Nolan determined that the inventory was effective in analyzing the ethical climate of an educational institution.

*The Theory of Planned Behavior*

In trying to understand the process that leads a senior student affairs officer to choose a behavior when confronting a situation, I applied the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1985), one of the underlying theoretical frameworks supporting this study. The theory, as developed by Azjen (1985), is an extension of the Theory of Reasoned Action (Chang, 1998). The theory of planned behavior complements the theory of reasoned action by developing a perceived behavioral control (Chang, 1998). The perceived behavioral control is a limitation that signifies the person's insight regarding the level of difficulty associated with engaging in the specified activity (Chang, 1998; Azjen, 1991). If the behavior does not fall within the volitional control of
the person, then the individual must have suitable resources and occasion to exhibit the behavior (Chang, 1998). In many cases, a senior student affairs officer is charged with adjudicating students responsible for violating a student conduct violation. However, the high-visibility of the #MeToo movement and federal legislation redefining Title IX of the Civil Rights Act has significantly affected the ability of senior student affairs officers to adjudicate these cases in the usual manner.

Ajzen (1991) offered two justifications for his theoretical premise. First, Ajzen claimed that “holding intention constant, the effort expended to bring a course of behavior to a successful conclusion is likely to increase with perceived behavioral control” (pg. 184). For example, Ajzen noted that, for two individuals who are strongly intent on learning how to ski, when attempting to learn, the person who has confidence in his or her ability to master the activity is more likely to persevere and succeed when compared to the individual who doubts his or her ability. In a similar sense, senior student affairs officers who are confident in their capacity (given their education and previous professional experience) will likely persist and prosper well in their professional capacity. Ajzen presented a second hypothesis, exploring the connection between perceived behavioral control and behavioral attainment. Azjen (1991) stipulated, “perceived behavioral control can often be used as a substitute for a measure of actual control” (pg. 184). According to Azjen (1991), this exchange is contingent on the accuracy of the perceptions. Azjen (1991) further indicated that “perceived behavioral control may not be particularly realistic when a person has relatively little information about the behavior, when requirements or available resources have changed, or when new and unfamiliar elements have entered into the situation” (pg. 185). Under these specific conditions, the measure of perceived behavioral control may not enhance the accuracy of behavioral prediction, but the extent to which the
perceived control is precise, this measure may be used to predict the probability of a successful behavioral attempt (Ajzen, 1991; 1985). When considering this within the context of senior student affairs officers (SSAOs’), an SSAO with no experience in crisis management will have a difficult time anticipating, managing, and resolving a crisis when it arises.

Figure 1: Theory of Planned Behavior

![Figure 1: Theory of Planned Behavior](image)

Figure 1 provides a visual representation of Ajzen’s theory of planned behavior. The theory of planned behavior suggests that an individual’s attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control, together influence behavioral intentions and intentions influence actual behaviors (Azjen, 1991, 1985). Additionally, the model presents a broken, dotted line between perceived behavioral control and behavior, which symbolizes a direct relationship
between the two. However, the broken line in the above figure suggests that the relationship between the two is frail.

The concept of perceived behavioral control was added to the theory of planned behavior as a predictor of behavioral intention and actual behavior. This addition was made to address situations in which an individual was determined to engage in a behavior, but not perceive the capacity to do so (Ajzen, 1991). Azjen supported that the perception of ability to follow through effects intention and the successful accomplishment of a behavior. The extension of perceived behavioral control was added to the theory as a behavioral determinant when intention does not always lead to success. When complete behavioral control is in the hands of an individual, behavioral intention is the only determinant of behavior, and perceived behavioral control only influences intention. The use of perceived behavioral control has been found to account for the main criticism of the theory of reasoned action, which is a lack of accounting for information awareness and past behavior (Kidwell & Jewell, 2010). The Kidwell and Jewell (2010) study found that perceived behavioral control was a better indicator of intention than attitude when the behavior had been done before. This finding is significant to the exploration of senior student affairs officers’ perceptions regarding their role in fostering an ethical climate, as the SSAO’s intention to engage in fostering an ethical campus climate can be encouraged (or hindered) by several factors, including 1) direct influence from institutional leadership (i.e. – president or board of trustees), 2) federal or state policies that may adversely affect the SSAO’s intentions.

The formation of the theory of planned behavior by Ajzen (1991) was done to extend the theory of reasoned action by employing advancements found in studies applying the theory, and the enhancements made have been successful. A study was conducted to test the differences between several behavioral theories and found the theory of planned behavior to be a better
predictor of behavior (Yousafzai, Foxall, and Pallister, 2010). However, the benefits of using the theory of planned behavior over the theory of reasoned action may be grounded in contextual use. Cooke and French (2008) displayed how the theory of planned behavior and theory of reasoned action were similar enough to be used as concepts within the same scholastic endeavor. Cook and French discovered that the theory of reasoned action was a sufficient forecaster of behavior when perceived behavioral control was insignificant. The use of the theory of reasoned action decreases analytical difficulty; however, when perceived behavioral control is considered, the theory of planned behavior provides an accurate prediction of behavior. Lastly, a study conducted by Chang (2013) discovered that the theory of planned behavior was a more effective measure of ethical intention among subjects and, in connection with prior behavior and standards, provided a better picture than the foundations associated with the theory of reasoned action.

The theory of planned behavior is widely accepted in the field of psychology, and it has been extended into other fields through scholarly exploration (Luarn and Lin, 2005; Lu, Yu, Liu, and Yao, 2003). However, criticism of the theory focuses on gaps in behavior that are not examined. According to Charng, Piliavin, and Callero (1988), the theory does not account for varying behavior over time. A study conducted by Conner and Armitage (1998) addressed this assessment and supplemented six additional concepts to the theory, counting the need to consider varying individual intentions over time. However, Conner and Armitage acknowledged that the demand of the theory for other scholastic areas lies in its absence of complication. The study suggested that the addition of the six concepts might reduce the external validity of the theory. However, when extending the theory of planned behavior to the field of student affairs in higher education, external validity is a critical concern given the context of some senior student affairs.
officers (i.e. – those employed at public-sponsored institutions and those who work at private institutions, small liberal arts colleges vs. large research universities, etc.). The following section describes why the theory of planned behavior is appropriate for exploring how senior student affairs officers perceive their role in fostering an ethical climate.

Smith (2010) used the theory of planned behavior as a framework and developed a survey that examined the perceptions of academic and professional integrity. The study looked at nine nursing programs, including 167 students who agreed to participate in further exploration of the phenomena. This study was able to recognize the distinctive perceptions of academic and professional fraudulence, while also determining that there is a significant relationship between the two phenomena. The study demonstrated the need for a predictable, generally acknowledged meaning of academic dishonesty in nursing training. Furthermore, leaders in the nursing field were strongly encouraged to act to create mediating activities and strategy to appropriately address and respond to academic dishonestly, noting that these acts seem to be an indicator of potential inappropriate, and in some cases illicit, nursing practice.

While empirical research on the theory of planned behavior is rich with several explorations, including student affairs and higher education in general, there is a scarcity of scholarly research that primarily focuses on leaders within the higher education enterprise and how they perceive their role in fostering an ethical campus climate. The application of the theory has been used to explore student ethical decision-making in academic dishonesty matters (Meng, Othman, D’Silva, and Omar, 2014; Nga and Lum, 2013; Smith, 2013), whistleblowing in organizations (Meriwether, 2016; Park and Blenkinsopp, 2009; Zhang, Chiu, and Wei, 2009) and college trustees’ intentions to promote succession planning (2012). A study conducted by Leonard, Cronin, and Kreie (2003) assumed that behavioral intent is influenced by the attitude of
an individual (which in turn is influenced by the effects of action and organizational surroundings), obligation, and personal characteristics. The outcome of the study indicates that some factors that affect attitude and behavioral intention are consistently significant. Other factors are only relevant in some scenarios. Institutions and non-profit entities can develop realistic training programs for information technology professionals and managers from the study’s results and incorporate deterrent and preventive measures that can curb the rising tide of unwanted abuse.

Applying the theory of planned behavior to explore university trustee succession planning, the results noted that while the trustees felt under pressure from faculty and staff (subjective standards) regarding succession planning, the trustees had satisfactory attitudes towards succession planning and held positive perceptions of their perceived behavioral control of succession planning; and indicated intentions to promote and foster that process. Senior student affairs officers encounter similar friction and compression from faculty and staff regarding their student support and engagement efforts. In applying the theory of planned behavior, this study explored attitudes toward fostering an ethical campus climate, perceptions of the beliefs of influential individuals and/or groups, and outcomes of fostering an ethical campus climate (subjective norms and perceived behavioral control) to examine senior student affairs officers’ behavioral intentions to promote and foster an ethical campus climate. The theory assumed that individuals were cogent, they made systemic use of information available to them when making decisions, and they did not have total control in most situations. It is also assumed that some of the situational contexts that senior student affairs officers may reference may involve challenges with free speech, federal and local regulations affecting sex discrimination and substance abuse, and student behavioral control.
Gap in the Literature

There continues to be an evolving concern about the broader ethical climate in higher education (Erkutlu and Chafra, 2014; Stewart, Volpone, Avery and McKay, 2011; Putranta and Kingshott, 2011; Ganske, 2010). Boyer (1990) noted that there is an interest among many higher education leaders to craft a civility statement that encourages all community members to respect others and embrace shared behavioral norms. Bok (1988) discussed the critical role faculty and institutional policies play in creating an ethical climate on campus. He postulated that educational institutions are distracted by racial and cultural incorporation, political influence, substance abuse, and labor strikes while enduring the adverse impacts and decrease of quality educators and the promotion of quality behavioral norms and morals. What attention is given to the ethical climate on campus is often focused on student academic behavior or student social behavior (Dannells, 1997; Collision, 1990) rather than on the behavior of faculty, staff and institutional leaders, and on the institutional policies and procedures that promote an ethical campus climate. It is clear that the investigation of a campus ethical climate can focus on more than selected student behaviors. Moreover, according to Wimbush (1991), many studies indicate that there is a significant relationship between ethical behavior and the promotion of an organizational ethical climate. Moreover, Wimbush noted that organizational leaders have a significant responsibility for promoting, generating and upholding an ethical climate within their organizations.

Contrast these positive organizational characteristics with those of senior student affairs leaders who may lead or make decisions based upon routine procedures, automated actions, and myopic interpretations (i.e. – an outdated code for student conduct, lack of flexibility for student conduct sanctions, and assume that a very emotional student will harm themselves and/or others
and has to be removed from campus). Senior student affairs officers may fail to understand the organizational ethical climate and misestimate an action based on their experience at a different institution. They may be steadfast and devoted to certain ideas and differing and diverse perspectives become unwelcome. These determinations can lead to serious problems that can jeopardize relationships and even careers, especially for senior student affairs administrators. The concepts of planned behavior and ethical climate theory can help senior student affairs officers circumvent such consequences in which many institutions of higher education often find themselves.

Following the footprint provided by Buchan (2005), using the practical application of the ethical climate theory provided by Victor and Cullen (1988) along with the framework provided by the theory of planned behavior (Azjen, 1991) offers an opportunity to further explore how senior student affairs officers perceive their role in fostering an ethical campus climate. Moreover, prompted by Buchan’s research, this study provides an opportunity to view how behavioral intention, actual behavior, and the type of ethical climate affects outcomes. While prior studies utilizing both theories were explored quantitatively in nature (Buchan, 2005; Loch and Conger, 1996), this study intends on employing a qualitative approach to explore the perceptions of senior student affairs officers in fostering an ethical campus climate.

Summary

The aforementioned studies are all strong contributions to the topic of this research, which focuses on the role senior student affairs officers perceive they play in fostering an ethical climate. There is an abundance of research that has been conducted on student affairs, ethical climate, and the theory of planned behavior. However, the exploration of these constructs within the context of higher education is nascent; while the theory of planned behavior has been used to
explore several aspects of higher education (Winrow, 2016; Richardson, Wang, and Hall, 2012; Payan and Reardon, 2010; Reingle, Thombs, Osborn, 2010), the theory has not been used to explore the perceptions of higher education leaders and their roles in fostering an ethical campus life. Additionally, the literature review indicated the constructs of organizational ethical climate and the theory of planned behavior to be understudied through the backdrop of colleges and universities. In the chapter that follows, the methodology employed in the study will be presented, which includes detailed descriptions of the research design, sampling method, data collection methods, and data analyses.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

This chapter provides a detailed description of the research approach utilized in this study, including the justification for the research approach, the research design, methodology, data collection methods, and process I used to analyze the findings. The research for this scholarly endeavor was conducted using a descriptive case study method. According to Kaplan and Maxwell (2005), qualitative research can demonstrate how participants make sense of events and how their insights informed their actions as opposed to determining exactly what occurred. Specifically, this study focused on exploring how senior student affairs officers perceive their role in fostering an ethical climate for their campuses. Several sources of data described below informed the study and provided a detailed framework.

Research Justification

To explore how senior student affairs officers perceive their role in fostering an ethical campus climate, I utilized a narrative case study methodology. According to Merriam (2002), the core of narrative inquiry focuses on learning personal stories and how individuals construct the world within their experiences. Because this was a case study, each participant was the unit of analysis, which is also considered an individual “case.” Case studies provide greater detail to be collected that would not be easily obtained by other research methods (Creswell, 2007). The rationale for this approach stemmed from the notion that there is limited research on how higher education leaders, specifically senior student affairs administrators, foster an ethical environment on their campuses. According to Creswell (2007), a case study usually examines a topic by exploring the phenomenon in a bounded system. In this case, the bounded system included the experiences of several senior student affairs administrators at four-year, state-sponsored and
private higher education institutions, and who report directly to the president (or the chief student affairs officer) of their respective institution.

A case study is characterized by a desire for an in-depth understanding of the issue, with the focus on a representative subject (Fitzpatrick, Sanders, and Worthen, 2004). The case study method allows for the responses of a small group of representative participants to be considered and generalized for a larger relevant population (Gall, Gall, and Borg, 2003). A quantitative approach, with its emphasis on mathematically establishing patterns of incidence (Flyvbjerg, 2006), would not have served this research effort. Rather, I was concerned in this study with how senior student affairs officers perceive their roles in fostering an ethical campus climate. The focus was on reports of individual experiences and finding threads of commonality among the separate narratives that may provide a picture of the generalized conditions for senior student affairs administrators in higher education environments. By using this qualitative approach, my goal was to identify perceived patterns of incidence or behavior and the intentions or significance underlying these patterns.

I selected a narrative case study approach for three main reasons. First, the nature of the research problem was multifaceted, and the case study design lent itself well to studies with many variables (Merriam, 1988; Yin, 1994; 2003). Gall, Gall, and Borg (2007) described the case study approach as “the in-depth study of one or more instances of a phenomenon in its real-life context reflecting the perspective of the participants involved in the phenomenon” (p. 447). This examination of senior student affairs administrators and their ability to foster an ethical student climate at several institutions involved the intersection of many variables. For example, staff interactions took place on the university-wide, divisional, departmental, and individual levels. Furthermore, interactions and engagement regarding the creation of an ethical student
climate occurred on numerous levels in the organizational structure: between the senior student affairs administrators and other senior leadership officials, as well as among student affairs and other area support staff members.

Second, narrative case studies also produce detailed descriptions of the phenomena (Merriam, 1988; Yin, 1994; Stake, 1995). The data gathered on senior student affairs administrators and their individual and collective perceptions of this research phenomenon within their institutional and organizational contexts offers valuable information for both practitioners and researchers to advance their understanding of how senior student affairs officers perceive their role in fostering an ethical campus climate.

Lastly, the case study research approach is effective when there are understudied phenomena (Merriam, 1988; Yin, 1994; 2003). As discussed in Chapter 2, there is little empirical data based on a qualitative research design, on how senior student affairs officers perceive their role in fostering an ethical campus climate. As an understudied phenomenon, exploring the role senior student affairs officers perceive they play in fostering an ethical campus climate warrants examination through a case study research design. This approach has value by contributing to a greater appreciation and understanding of the perceptions of senior student affairs officers regarding their role in fostering an ethical campus climate. Exploring their perceptions, how they define the campus ethical climate, and how they describe their relationships with other campus leaders and partners regarding their efforts to foster an ethical campus climate collaboratively each previously unexplored in the higher education environment. Therefore, for those reasons previously stated, I selected a case study approach for this study.
Research Design

The primary purpose of educational research is the acquisition of new information (Borg & Gall, 1989). Qualitative research enabled me to describe data in the language of the study subject (Trochim, 1989). Manning (1992) argues that using a qualitative research approach will allow me the ability to provoke thought and gain substance that can better assist college and university administrators. According to Yin (2009), the most significant goal of the case study approach is to confirm that the data being explored throughout this project corresponds to the research question. The focal point of this study was to collect information from senior student affairs officers to determine how they perceive their role in fostering an ethical campus climate. The questions were open-ended to gather qualitative data on the lived experience of senior student affairs administrators involved in these lived experiences.

Because qualitative inquiry has a fluid and flexible design that changes throughout the process, the research question could have been amended at a later point in the process; however, according to Meadows (2003), I determined that the primary research question was appropriate to navigate this study. The research question was as broad as possible to collect as much information as possible related to how senior student affairs officers perceive their role in fostering an ethical campus climate. Moreover, Creswell (2012) and Yin (2009) postulate that this approach provides an appropriate methodological foundation for exploring the senior student affairs administrators’ experiences and perceptions through questions focused on “how and why”.

Participants

A non-probability purposive sampling process was used to obtain participants for the study. Patton (2015) described purposive sampling as a strategy that selects people,
communities, or cases that are “information rich” (p. 46). They are able to provide specific insight to the issue being explored. Creswell (2008) proposed that purposive sampling was appropriate when participants must have experienced the phenomenon to be explored. Purposive sampling does have limitations; however, this method can be one of the facets of a case study which leads to a rich and deeper understanding of the phenomenon being explored (Merriam, 2009). In this case, the focus was on senior student affairs officers discussing their lived experiences in fostering an ethical climate for their respective campus.

For the purposes of this study, the senior student affairs officer were identified by the following characteristics: 1) the head of the division of student affairs (also known as student life, campus life, student services, or university life), who directly reports to the president or provost of their institution; 2) individuals who directly report to the head of the division, and may be referred to as the associate or assistant vice president, the dean or associate/assistant dean of students (if the head of the division is also the dean of students).

I extended an invitation to all 19 of the senior student affairs officers who recently served on the Region II Advisory Board for the National Association for Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA). At the time of the study, there were 19 board members who identified as senior student affairs officers; after several invitations, 7 board members agreed to participate in this study. In addition, the research participants were not be excluded based on gender, socio-economic status, and/or any other identity-based criteria.

Recruitment and Access

For this case study to be successful, having access to the individuals who understand the case the best was essential. In their work on examining accuracy and detail in qualitative research, Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, and Fontenot (2013) found that aside from selecting a
research topic and identifying the appropriate research approach to match, “no other research task is more fundamental to creating credible research than obtaining an adequate sample” (p.11). This research project focused on gaining the experiences and perspectives of senior student affairs officials responsible for fostering an ethical student climate on campus.

Onwuegbuzie and Collins (2007) recommended six to ten participants for a basic qualitative study involving interviews. Seidman (2013) suggested that a researcher should not limit the number of participants but rather should choose a sufficient number to represent the purpose of the study. According to Tracy (2013), the criteria for determining the number of participants required for a qualitative study were not as rigid as for a quantitative study. Tracy suggested a sample of six to eight participants and monitoring saturation as each set of data were analyzed. After considering the suggestions of these scholars, I determined that a sample of 7 participants was a sufficient number of participants to begin my research.

After obtaining permission and support from the NASPA National Office to proceed with this study (please see attached e-mail from Ms. Alexis Wesaw, Director of Data Analytics for NASPA), I contacted the regional director and asked him to contact those members of the advisory board who satisfy the above noted criteria to inform them of my dissertation research. Subsequently, I sent a follow-up e-mail (from my husky.neu.edu email address only, and reminding them of my previous service as a NASPA Region II board member), and invite them to participate in my dissertation research (see Appendix A for sample e-mail). Once I received confirmation of the participant’s willingness to participate, I made contact to confirm a date, time, and location for the interview.
Data Collection

Once the research participants were selected for the study, one-on-one, semi-structured, open-ended interviews will take place with each participant. The interview participants were asked to engage in one-sixty (60) minute audio-recorded (or video recorded) interview session at a time and place that is comfortable and convenient for each participant. The one-on-one interview data was collected, transcribed, and analyzed accordingly. Interviews offered richer and more extensive material than other forms of data such as surveys (Yin, 2011). I asked each member of the study to participate in an oral interview of approximately one hour at a location mutually convenient for both the participant and me. The questions posed during this interview revolved around the officer’s experiences, insights, and perceptions of an SSAO’s role in fostering an ethical campus climate (see Appendix D for interview protocol). After the transcription of these interviews, I gave each person an opportunity to review the transcription if he or she wishes in order to verify the accuracy of his or her answers.

Participants were provided with open-ended questions to explore their perspectives, experiences, and perceptions with fostering an ethical campus climate (see Appendix F). Yin (2011) writes that open-ended interviewing questions allow participants to share their construction of reality and individual thoughts about the specific situation, which can provide important insight into the case. Similarly, Patton (1990) emphasized, “The purpose of open-ended interviewing is not to put things in someone’s mind…but to assess the perspective of the person being interviewed” (p. 278). The questions were open-ended in order for participants to be able to elaborate and share their own perceptions and experiences.
Data Analysis

According to Stake (1995), data analysis is “a matter of giving meaning to the first impressions as well as to the final compilations” (p. 71). Creswell (2007) indicates that case study analysis often entails detailed accounts of the case in question, and its context which is critical (p. 163). In most qualitative studies, data collection and analysis occur simultaneously (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). For this case, an “along-the-way” approach was used to analyze the data. During each phase of the data collection process, I managed the information that was collected. Overall, the research design and data analysis process followed the General Inductive Approach (GIA) as outlined by Thomas (2006):

1. Preparation of raw data files (“data cleaning”);
2. Close reading of text;
3. Creation of categories;
4. Overlapping coded and uncoded text;
5. Continuing revision and refinement of category system.

According to Creswell (2007), the initial step of analysis for qualitative data is to prepare and organize the data. I reviewed each case, digital recordings, and interview transcripts directly. I reviewed and re-read transcripts and notes until the themes became transparent. After phase one of data collection, I developed an initial description of each document and explored emerging codes using lean coding. Creswell (2007) defines this type of coding as “assigning very few codes during the first reading of a manuscript in an attempt to reduce codes to broad themes” (p. 244). Creswell asserts that using fewer themes is best when writing a detailed qualitative report, which is the goal of this case study. After gaining a better understanding of the data that had been collected through lean coding, an exploratory approach was applied for coding the data.
from this study (Saldaña, 2013). In applying an exploratory method of coding, the data was reviewed three additional times. In addition, once themes were identified, I employed the use of matrices (Miles and Huberman, 1994) to better analyze and interpret the data.

During the next round of coding, for each of the documents and interview transcriptions, In Vivo Coding was used. In Vivo Coding is “the practice of assigning a label to a section of data, such as an interview transcript, using a word or short phrase taken from that section of the data” (King, 2008). This method was especially useful in coding interview transcripts as it allowed me to utilize a participant’s own words as the code for a particular passage (Saldaña, 2013). Before engaging in an additional round of coding, I imported the Word document into the QSR NVivo qualitative data analysis software to manage and analyze the data for similar themes. For the third round of coding, descriptive coding was applied in order to process and synthesize larger sections of that data. The final round of coding employed provisional coding (Saldaña, 2013, p. 144). This round of coding analyzed the data related to a list of codes based on the theoretical frameworks and literature review for this study. Interviews were sorted into a database of spreadsheets to read closely and code. I continued to review the coding categories and refine the themes that were emerging as the data was reviewed. The four forms of data analysis advocated by Stake (1995) were employed in this study including categorical aggregation, direct interpretation, establishing patterns, and naturalistic generalizations.

Data Storage

Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed after each interview. A flash drive containing a copy of the audio/video recordings and raw transcribed data will be stored in a lockable file cabinet until transcripts are verified for accuracy; data was stored on a password-protected computer that is only accessible by the student researcher and in two online, password-
protected locations. Documents from colleges, universities, or other student affairs professional organizations related to this research endeavor will be de-identified by removing all identifiable information, including names of people, offices, and places. Data will be used only for the purpose of answering the research question(s) formulated for this study and will not be reserved for future research.

Audio/video recordings, interview transcripts, documents, and the master list of interview participants will be destroyed (digital files deleted, and hard paper copies shredded) within three-five years after completion of this study. De-identified interview transcripts was stored indefinitely. As previously stated, the names of interview participants and study locations will not be identified on any document related to this study. Consent forms will be retained for three (3) years after completion of the study in a lockable file cabinet; scanned copies will be stored on a password-protected personal computer and in an online cloud system for backup purposes. Three (3) years after completion of the study, hard copies of the informed consent forms will be shredded, and scanned copies will be deleted from all locations.

Trustworthiness

Given that, in qualitative studies, I am the primary instrument in gathering data, it is important to ensure the trustworthiness of the study in question (Shenton, 2004). Creswell (2008) shared that the trustworthiness of qualitative research is impacted by my perception and the chosen research paradigm. And so? Additionally, there is much criticism over the validity and trustworthiness of case study research (Hamel, Dufour, and Fortin, 1993; Zucker, 2001; Pegram, 2000; McGloin, 2008). However, Koch (as cited by McGloin, 2008) suggests incorporating measures such as an audit trail, peer reflection, and reflexivity to appropriately assess the data provided.
When interviewing research participants within a shortened timeframe, I engaged in a member-checking process to ensure internal consistency and either add or provide deeper understanding to their perspectives. Baxter and Jack (2008) indicate that researchers have an obligation to ensure the research question is “clearly written” (p. 556), and that this method is the appropriate design to explore the research question in mind. Researchers should incorporate occasions to witness the incident or spectacle, and use this as an opportunity to build rapport with research participants. In addition to the aforementioned strategy in obtaining trustworthiness in the study, the use of methodological triangulation was employed to increase the validity of this study. The use of varied data sources, such as accessing publications, annual reports, social media group affiliations, and/or drawings can help solidify and confirm the development of themes showcased in the interviews (Creswell, 2008).

During the analysis stage, feedback from the research participants was compared to determine areas of agreement as well as areas of divergence. Ultimately, the information gathered via triangulation added validation to the trustworthiness of the study. From an internal validity standpoint and given the topic of studying student ethical development through the eyes of senior college/university officials (through the lens of organizational mindfulness), two major threats can be data collector characteristics and data collector bias.

To avoid these forms of bias, I was consistent with the questions asked of participants via the following strategies (Rubin & Rubin, 2012): a) asking the questions of all research participants in the same manner, b) making sure that the research participants are comfortable with the interview process by asking questions that are easy to answer, which forged a trusting relationship with them, c) interviews were conducted in a comfortable and inviting location, and to be determined by the research participant, and d) to make the participants feel at ease, it is
important to ensure that their responses are not identifiable via their name or background, particularly for the outcome write-up of the study.

Finally, I engaged in member checking throughout the study, which also ensured the trustworthiness of the data gathered. Given that the data emerged from the interaction between the interviewer and participant, all themes and information gathered can be verified and corrected accordingly. In sum, the combination of the aforementioned trustworthiness strategies contributed greatly to the authenticity and overall validity of the data collected for the study.

Protection of Human Subjects

I successfully completed the Protecting Human Subjects training sponsored by the National Institute of Health. In addition, prior to data collection, the research was brought to the Institutional Review Board (“IRB”) at Northeastern University where the study was reviewed and approved (see IRB Approval). Participation in this endeavor did not present any obvious risks to the research participants. No harm came to any research participant as a result of willingly engaging in any phase of this study. To maintain confidentiality, the digital audio recordings of interviews were stored on my password-protected personal computer and only I have access to the data that was used for the findings of this study.
Chapter 4 – Research Findings

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the perceptions of senior student affairs officers (SSAOs) regarding their role in fostering an ethical campus climate. The study focused on the following research questions:

1. How do senior student affairs officers (SSAOs) perceive their role in fostering an ethical campus climate?

2. How do the perceptions of SSAOs’ regarding their role in fostering an ethical climate on college campuses influence their actions and behavior?

For the purposes of this study, the senior student affairs officer was identified by the following characteristics: 1) the head of the division of student affairs (also known as student life, campus life, student services, or university life), who directly reports to the president or provost of their institution, and 2) individuals who directly report to the head of the division, and may be referred to as the associate or assistant vice president, the dean or associate/assistant dean of students (if the head of the division is also the dean of students). A case study was appropriate to answer these “how” questions. This chapter begins with brief biographies for each of the seven (7) participants and concludes with the themes that emerged from analysis of in-depth interviews and observations.

Participant Biographies

The chart in Appendix A displays a list of the senior student affairs officers who participated in this study. The participants were almost evenly divided between men (4) and women (3). Three (3) of the participants identified themselves as professionals of color (Mirta, Pertuz, and St. Leger). The following is a summary of the seven (7) senior student affairs officers who participated in the study and serve (or have just completed their service) on the
Region II Advisory Board for the National Association for Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA):

- Marijo O’Grady, Ph.D. serves as the Associate Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean of Students at Pace University – New York City Campus (NY). Dr. O’Grady has served as a senior student affairs officer for the past twenty (20) years, encompassing her administrative tenure at Pace University. She has been a member of NASPA since 1985 (a total of 33 years) and has served in various capacities on the NASPA Region II Advisory Board for the past 10 years. She has worked in higher education for the past 33 years. She received her Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) from New York University.

- Gabrielle St. Leger, Ed.D. serves as the Dean of Students at the New York Institute of Technology and serves as the chief student affairs officer for both their main campus in Old Westbury, Long Island and New York City. Dr. St. Leger has served as a senior student affairs officer for the past year (new to this capacity) and has been a member of NASPA since 2000 (approximately 18 years). She has been a member of the NASPA Region II Advisory Board since March 2017 (about 16 months). Dr. St. Leger is also an active member of the American College Personnel Association (ACPA). She received her Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) from West Virginia University.

- W. Houston Dougharty serves as the Vice President for Student Affairs at Hofstra University in Hempstead, New York. Mr. Dougharty has served as a senior student affairs officer for a total of 14 years (having served as a senior student affairs officer at four (4) different higher education institutions: Hofstra University, Grinnell College, Lewis & Clark College, and the University of Puget Sound). He has been a member of NASPA since 1993 (a total of 25 years) and has served on the NASPA Region II Advisory Board for the past three years.
While at Grinnell, he received the Outstanding Senior Student Affairs Officer award from NASPA Region IV-East in 2013 and the Distinguished Service to the Profession award from the Iowa Student Personnel Association in 2011. Prior to his administrative capacities in student affairs, Dr. Dougharty worked as a director of admissions, and has spent a total of 35 years working in higher education. Mr. Dougharty holds both a Master of Education (M.Ed.) from Western Washington University, and a Master of Arts (M.A.) from the University of California, Santa Barbara.

- Kirk Manning, Ph.D. serves as the Vice President for Student Development and Dean of Students at St. Thomas Aquinas College in Rockland County, New York. Dr. Manning has served as a senior student affairs officer, over several institutions, for 27 years, starting in this capacity after completing his doctoral dissertation. He has been a member of NASPA for over 30 years, although he noted that there was a time where he stepped away from active NASPA involvement as he considered stepping away from higher education in general. He has worked for a total of 38 years in higher education. He received his Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) from Vanderbilt University.

- Brian Mitra, Ed.D. serves as the Dean of Student Affairs at Kingsborough Community College – City University of New York (“CUNY”), in Brooklyn, New York. Dr. Mitra has served as a senior student affairs officer for the past five years. He has been a member of NASPA for the past sixteen years and has been a member of the NASPA Region II Advisory Board since 2015. Dr. Mitra has also been an active member of the NASPA Community College Knowledge Community and served as a faculty member of the NASPA James E. Scott Academy Board. He has worked in higher education for the past 17 years and received his Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) from Teachers College of Columbia University.
• Sofia Bautista-Pertuz, Ph.D. serves as the Assistant Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean of Students at Hofstra University in Hempstead, New York. Dr. Bautista-Pertuz has served as a senior student affairs officer for the past four years and has worked in higher education for almost 25 years. She has been a member of NASPA for over 15 years and has been a member of the NASPA Region II Advisory Board for the past two years. She continues to support NASPA through their Associate/Assistant Vice President for Student Affairs (AVP) Steering Committee. She is a previous recipient of the NASPA Region II Scott Goodnight Award for Outstanding Leadership as a Dean and the NASPA Latino Knowledge Community Outstanding Service Award. Dr. Bautista-Pertuz received her Doctor of Philosophy from Seton Hall University.

• Michael Christakis, Ph.D. serves as the Vice President for Student Affairs at the University at Albany, State University of New York (“SUNY”) in Albany, New York. Dr. Christakis has served as a senior student affairs officer for the past 11 years and has worked in the field of higher education for almost 23 years. He has been a member of NASPA since 2005 (approximately 13 years) and has been a member of the NASPA Region II Advisory Board for the past 12 years. He presently serves as the Director of the NASPA Region II Advisory Board, and previously served as the chair of the NASPA Assessment, Evaluation, and Research Knowledge Community. Dr. Christakis received his Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) from the University of Albany, State University of New York (SUNY).

Themes

Using inductive analysis after transcribing the interviews, I read, and then reread, each transcript several times, then coded each using a combination of descriptive and In-Vivo coding. From this process, numerous themes (along with some sub-themes) emerged. The main themes
addressed the two research questions the study posed regarding the role senior student affair officers play in fostering an ethical campus climate.

*Defining Ethical Climate & Ethical Dilemmas*

It was interesting to note how the senior student affairs officers (SSAOs’) who participated in this study defined ethical climate. While many identified it as a “broad subject,” many indicated that the ethical climate was at the core of the SSAO’s work on a college or university campus. Manning and O’Grady noted that it is difficult to tease out ethics from the role of the senior student affairs officer. Many participants noted that, while maintaining an ethical campus climate was both critical and essential, they specifically believed that it should be a comprehensive expectation for all members of the campus community, and not just students, to follow and abide by community standards of behavior. Christakis, Dougherty and O’Grady stated that the SSAO cannot be absolved from serving as an ethical leader, as they serve as the role models for students, faculty, and professional colleagues at other institutions. Many of the participants indicated that identifying and reporting unethical behavior was critical and needed to be a priority across every unit in the campus community.

Several of the research participants noted that certain institutions make the ethical campus climate a priority, engraving their institution’s values and purpose to new faculty, staff, and students from day one. Both Manning and O’Grady noted that student affairs served as the “conscience” of the campus, setting the tone for the ethical campus climate. All participants noted that student affairs should focus their ethical campus climate on building and embedding community and promoting civic-minded engagement. Several of the participants stipulated that it is a significant priority for the student affairs unit to educate students on ethics, ethical
development, and preparing responsible citizens. Manning indicated that student ethical development was essential, given his current role at a faith-based institution.

Participants indicated that there are institutions that are more reactive to issues related to maintaining the campus ethical climate, noting that it is particularly a fragmented response (noting that depending on the severity or attention being given to the reported unethical behavior, certain aspects of the college or university community respond). Manning and O’Grady indicated that there is a lack of student ethical development occurring within the transactional classroom setting. Many associated the campus ethical climate with ethical dilemmas like free speech, sexual assault, and substance abuse. O’Grady specifically spoke to the attention the “#MeToo” movement that has brought the challenge of addressing campus-based sexual violence.

Participants noted a major external influence that negatively affected campus ethical climate was the social-political atmosphere in Washington, D.C. (especially under the current presidency). Many of the research participants spoke about President Trump and his rhetoric during the 2016 presidential campaign, his personal demeanor towards women, his perspective on immigration (i.e. – noting the building of a border wall, and restricting international students from attending American universities), and perspectives on free speech – specifically his views on news media. Christakis, Dougherty, Pertuz, and St. Leger specifically noted that the social-political atmosphere may have fueled the evolving ethical campus climate with a heightened focused on diversity and inclusion. All of the research participants noted the adverse impact both commercial and social media have had on student behavior, engagement, and the branding of higher education institutions. Moreover, Christakis, Pertuz, and St. Leger agreed that the ethical campus climate has a direct negative affect on the student’s social normative experience.
Relationships and Reputation

Another set of subthemes that arose during the interviews with the SSAOs’ who participated in this study revolved around the relationships and reputation of the senior student affairs officers and their perceived ability to foster an ethical campus climate. Many participants noted that transparency and consistency were key to maintaining an ethical campus climate, particularly for the senior student affairs officer. The following subthemes were identified during our interviews: 1) the role (or lack thereof) of trust, 2) the importance of the SSAO staying informed, and 3) the SSAO being perceived as the content/area expert regarding the campus ethical climate. In addition, there were interesting connections between subthemes on how the SSAO’s role in fostering an ethical campus climate were perceived by both the campus president and faculty.

SSAO Reputation & the Campus President

The participants who engaged in this study talked about their relationships and rapport with the campus president, and the role trust and reputation played in that relationship. It should be specifically noted that two of the seven research participants in this study do not directly report to their institution’s president (in addition, at the time of this study, the supervisor of one of the research participants was serving as the college’s interim president). While several participants shared that they have worked for presidents who only thought of them as party planners and the social arm of the college/university, a few of the participants noted that many campus presidents appreciated the role of the senior student affairs officer. They mentioned that the SSAO must distinguish and understand the president’s agenda, their strategic priorities and know their expectations. Moreover, the participants noted that they want a president who viewed the SSAO as a partner and sought to be inclusive across the campus community. The president
sees the SSAO as a conduit to connecting with students and community partners. Some of the research participants did indicate that, while their president may not have a sense of what they do every day, they appreciated the SSAO’s ability to keep the problems away from their office or attention.

St. Leger indicated that her current president expects her to be the role model for not just her students but the campus community in general. In addition, she noted that the president has invited her to the table to assist with brand identity and messaging, acknowledging student affairs’ ability to share and tell stories that help recruit, retain, and engage students. Dougherty, Manning, and O’Grady all noted that they have always been the go-to people and trusted by their campus presidents. They shared that their presidents appreciated their capacity to address and manage the “messes” that occur both on and off campus. However, they also indicated that they have all worked for presidents who thought their job was to coordinate student parties and other social events.

Additionally, several participants noted that presidents have only equated their role in managing and addressing student misconduct, and not associating how this may affect the overall campus climate. Dougherty, O’Grady, and Pertuz indicated that some of the presidents they have previously worked with made decisions without consulting the SSAO, leading to wasted time, resources, and frustration among many constituencies around campus. St. Leger shared that a lack of consultation and consideration between the president and SSAO led to some serious organizational changes, impacting the role of the SSAO on both campuses.

Christakis specifically mentioned that it depended on the president's lens. He indicated that, during his time working with three different presidents at SUNY Albany, they all valued the SSAO in very different ways. He continued to explain that NASPA had made great strides the
last 5-7 years, promoting the role of the senior student affairs officer in ensuring student success, career preparation, and academic persistence. In addition, Christakis noted that student risk and crisis management uniquely fall within the confines of student affairs and the SSAO, since they know how to manage and address these types of fallouts. When a president acknowledges and appreciates the SSAO’s role in this regard, it gives greater credence and support for the SSAO in and around the campus community.

The Role of Trust (or Lack Thereof) and Faculty

Many of the participants indicated that there were serious positive and negative perspectives in terms of the role of trust (or lack thereof) between the senior student affairs officer, student affairs (as a whole), and the faculty. Manning indicated that it helped an SSAO to reach out to faculty who cared just as much about their students as they did their academic courses. Moreover, many of the participants shared that connecting with those faculty who cared about their students would also create allies for the work student affairs engaged in around their campus in terms of fostering an ethical campus climate. Dougherty noted that the SSAO needed to be seen by faculty as someone who is fair, invited diverse opinions, welcomed dissent, celebrated diversity, interested in creating an environment of trust, and engaged in productive dialogue.

Dougherty indicated that, during his time on eight campuses in his professional career, faculty welcomed student affairs as partners in helping to create a just community. In addition, faculty who saw the tangible efforts and work of student affairs tended to have increased trust in their work and professional efforts. O’Grady stated that faculty highly respected senior student affairs officers who were visible and engaged faculty in the ethical decision-making process. In her short time as a senior student affairs officer, St. Ledger saw her relationship with the faculty
and academic leadership critical to addressing unethical issues across campus. Pertuz indicated that faculty seemed very responsive to wanting to develop programs and create space for conversation with students about the uncomfortable topics related to the campus ethical climate (such as diversity, inclusion, and sexual violence). Moreover, Pertuz and St. Leger shared that faculty often conferred with them on topics related to issues related to college sexual violence (i.e. - #MeToo and Dr. Nasser’s sexual abuse of members of the U.S. gymnastics team).

Christakis, Manning, and O’Grady indicated that faculty lacked an appreciation for the senior student affairs officer, and often saw student affairs as the “dumping ground” for the unethical issues they were not prepared to manage or address in their classrooms. Christakis pointed out that the advent of student affairs, as a vocation in higher education, came about due to faculty not wanting to engage in student ethical development. In addition, O’Grady noted that faculty (especially adjunct faculty) failed to attend and participate in ethics training and lacked the courage (and/or encouragement) to report unethical student and faculty misconduct. O’Grady expressed that faculty were displeased when students reported or shared concerns with student affairs professionals regarding concerns about their academic experience. Pertuz mentioned that faculty only associated the ethical campus climate with issues related to academic integrity or the academic honor code (which were normally in the academic domain). Moreover, Pertuz and St. Leger noted that faculty overwhelmingly expected them to be the lead on issues related to campus sexual violence, not extending the trust to their team of student affairs administrators (who were equally as knowledgeable)

SSAO as Leader of an Ethical Campus Climate

Several of the research participants indicated that the senior student affairs officer (SSAO) served not only as an ethical leader but, as O’Grady shared, as the “banner carrier” for
the rest of the campus leadership. I inferred that the SSAO served as the ethical conscious for the executive cabinet, and often challenged recommendations and decisions that were either seen as unethical, self-serving, or failed to benefit the campus community as a whole. Manning revealed that the way an SSAO interacted and engaged with people was viewed as “on and visible”; they were unable to digress from engaging in, or displaying, any unethical behavior and must always be conscious of this. Manning noted that the SSAO must always do what is right given their visibility and could not be swayed by their personal politics or agenda. In addition, Manning stated that the SSAO must be cautious as to how they engage with constituencies (i.e. – both personal and professional) through any social media, as this could harm their on-campus relationships.

Dougherty shared that the SSAO could not be absolved from being an ethical leader, given their role as both a community builder and as someone responsible for upholding and enforcing community standards. Dougherty noted that, as SSAO, serving in these roles required energy, dedication, and commitment. However, he also indicated that the person in this capacity could grow weary if they are alone. He continued by stating that the SSAO needed to be actively engaged in helping the campus community in identifying and determining what the values and standards of the institution were, and that he was often sought after by the President and senior leadership in this regard. But he also noted that this role was often complex and involved a myriad of emotions, critical thinking, and an ethos of care and inclusivity, but that the grind of daily administrative tasks often interfered with this priority.

At a recent staff leadership retreat, Dougherty pointed out that he reminded his team about the institution’s mission and purpose within the context of their professional standards and ethos for their division. Furthermore, he challenged his team to frame, and re-frame, their
dialogue with student leaders related to ethics and ethical decision-making and reminded them, “students will learn more from observing us than listening to us.” St. Leger communicated similar sentiments but added that the SSAO’s personal ethos needs to be intact and talked about how important it was to have professional colleagues that shared in the SSAO’s ethical ethos. She made mention of a time where members of her team were always late to meetings, or inconsistent in their attendance at meetings. She noted when this type of incongruence for the SSAO comes about, they must be prepared to have difficult conversations with their team in order to address and correct the behavior.

O’Grady noted that for the SSAO, it comes down to their word (intention) and our work (behavior), both in subtle and not so subtle ways, and must ensure fair treatment across the board. As an SSAO, she acknowledged that she was obligated to bring together un-like groups and educate multiple constituencies on their shared commonalities. Furthermore, O’Grady mentioned that the SSAO needed to consider the ethical climate across the board (i.e. – how it affected reporting, teaching in the classroom, budgeting and how funds were spent). She continued by saying that the SSAO needed to be "unafraid" to be the bigger person and say when something was wrong.

She recalled a time she encountered a situation involving a non-traditional student who always complained about campus occurrences, and that she and other campus leaders did not want to engage with or listed to her anymore (and specifically noted that, ethically, this was wrong). She continued that she, as the SSAO, needed to be the voice for these populations, and could not be concerned about whether other campus constituencies were upset by these student’s complaints. In addition, O’Grady indicated that there was usually one SSAO per campus and he or she was expected to be the, “jack of all trades” but often lacked serious financial and human
resources to effectively do the job. Moreover, she was concerned about the areas that should be concerned with campus ethical development, noting that in most cases, it was always student-focused and that the campus community was larger than just its students.

Christakis indicated that SSAOs’ were well positioned and should be the natural person to serve as the pulse of the campus ethical climate. He went on to note that dollars and cents were one thing but thinking about the campus culture could help transcend the message about ethics across all boundaries. He added that it is important to be mindful of the front line, entry-level staff and how those folks were modeling ethical behavior (and how you, as the SSAO, were modeling ethical behavior for them as well). He shared that his University’s mission statement was frequently questioned during strategic planning review in terms of ethics, which prompted dialogue for the campus’ leadership about the ethical preparation of their students. He continued to share that the SSAO needed to lead more aggressively about ethical reasoning and how to deal with such dilemmas (and challenge its incorporation in both the curricular and co-curricular arenas).

Relating to the ethics connected to student mental health, the SSAO must ensure their colleagues, faculty, and students know the ethical challenges and champion the ethical leadership needed in society today. He added that the SSAO may need to exercise critical leadership in this capacity and included campus student conduct in this fold. But he noted that, in student conduct, the focus should shift to proactive (rather than reactive) education. In addition, he also touched on holding his team to high ethical standards and referenced former Penn State football coach Joe Paterno in this regard. He shared that Coach Paterno and his staff’s involvement in “passing the buck”, during the situations involving former assistant coach Jerry Sandusky, was not only a huge problem but a significant failure in his leadership of the football program. He discussed a
situation that occurred at his institution involving students who lied about being assaulted on a bus one evening, and the radical and ethical outrage this caused around campus (especially with the incident being caught on video and being shared on several social media outlets). He tied this back to modeling positive ethical behavior, and how critical it was, albeit difficult, to champion good decisions.

Mitra hoped the SSAOs on campuses across the globe were modeling good behavior, as it was their responsibility but was also aware that some people have taken advantage of their positionality (indicating that it paints a bad vision for the vocation and position). He hoped, being new in his capacity, that colleagues held him to high expectations in terms of positive ethical behavior, especially in terms of the work his team engaged in to support students. He added that a prior SSAO had taken advantage of students in general, allowing some students to gain advantages over others because of their relationship with the SSAO.

*Consistency, Presence, Transparency, and Visibility as Strategy*

Many participants noted that consistency, presence, transparency, and visibility were key to maintaining an ethical campus climate, particularly for the senior student affairs officer, and should be viewed as the SSAO’s strategy. While Dougherty, Manning, and Mitra all mentioned that while a single strategy is difficult, it was necessary to consistently do and be seen doing what was right. Manning stated that modeling positive ethical behavior and developing trust and rapport were essential traits for an SSAO. He indicated that people needed to know that someone in his position cared. He was aware that this believe came from a small campus perspective noting that this would be very different for the SSAO from a larger school like Michigan State, and may involve a very different approach.
Pertuz and St. Leger both stipulated that presence and visibility were critical as strategies for the SSAO. They noted that students, staff, and parents loved and embraced these strategies as it allowed them access to the SSAO (in both formal and informal settings). Pertuz noted that, in her capacity, she identified ways for students to help review and add input on the university’s policies, such as the code for student conduct. She added that being honest with leadership was critical and mentioned the importance of speaking up when mixed and inconsistent messaging arose. Moreover, she shared that the SSAO knew the pulse of the campus community and should be expected to speak up when decisions were made that were unpopular or inconsistent with the institution's expectations.

St. Leger shared that not only were consistency and visibility key as strategies, she also indicated that it was critical to be updated and posted by members of her team when unethical behavior occurred. In addition, St. Leger noted that she would have to allow formal and informal time and space to learn about these matters from her team (not just her students but also from alumni and the external community surrounding her campus community). St. Leger continued to add that she could not look the other way when the ethics of the institution, her team, and her colleagues were questionable, and must use her interpersonal skills to appropriately address and confront these concerns. She also shared that, as an SSAO, one must be seen actively engaging in dialogue with the campus leadership and measure genuine interest of others in campus leadership who want to partner with the SSAO to meet with students and the external campus community when an unethical situation arises.

O’Grady also shared that visibility was key and practiced this by attending faculty and other administrative meetings. She remembered attending a faculty meeting where students were protesting the outcome of a student conduct proceeding (specifically focused on sexual assault
and harassment. She listened to the protestors and, afterwards, invited the protestors to sit down and work together to review the work done behind the scenes. She shared that it was critical to hear and listen to the protestors' ideas, noting that this could be scary, as not every idea would come to fruition. Helping to educate these students on the key processes involved allowed them to appreciate her transparency and allowed her to develop a trusting rapport and reputation moving forward.

Christakis indicated that there were self-inflicting barriers that SSAOs' caused themselves, impacting their ability to be visible and transparent. He shared that, in his current capacity, he does not interact with students anymore, and felt compelled to want to make time to meet with students. He discussed the relocation of the university’s Chapel House and helping campus constituents to understand the decision-making behind the relocation, and administrative challenges that came along with it. He continued by discussing the challenges that arose in relocating Project SHAPE (program focused on educating students about sexual and interpersonal violence) moving from the student affairs division to the university’s behavioral health unit. He added that people were uneasy with discomfort and could do more damage than good if integrity and ethics were not held high.

Lack of Ethical Training & Professional Development

All research participants interviewed indicated they received little formal training on ethics and ethical decision making, whether it was a core/elective component of their undergraduate/graduate degree programs, or informal (i.e. – as a component of their involvement and engagement in student affairs/higher education professional organizations). Some participants indicated that there were small aspects of ethics and/or ethical development covered in their doctoral/graduate programs.
However, every participant noted that they received practical ethics training through their involvement and engagement with organizations like NASPA, the American College Personnel Association (ACPA), and the Association for Student Conduct Administration (ASCA). In most cases, the training the participants received were in the form of 60-90 minutes workshops held at national and regional conferences. There were also weeklong programs like the Donald Gehring Academy for Student Conduct Administration (curriculum-based training centered on training for various student conduct officers) and the Leadership Educators Institute (provided an opportunity for student affairs practitioners to engage in active learning and discussion to assist with program and leadership course development). Christakis and Manning mentioned the National Association of College and Employers (NACE) as an outlet for exposing student affairs professionals to skills and information in student career preparation and development. Moreover, NACE provided a set of core competencies (one focused on work ethics and professional) that guided student affairs professionals to prepare for their career readiness.

Manning also shared that Middle States Accreditation made numerous references to ethical conduct and standards and needed to make these considerations in the appropriate context. Several participants referred to the Council for the Advancement of Standards (CAS) as another guiding document that professionals used for professional development. Manning referred to the Global Center for Ethics and Responsibility at St. Thomas Aquinas College, a program designed to facilitate programs and conversations on elements of organizational ethics and ethical decision making in different settings (and noted that this was a presidential initiative).

Christakis noted that, as a state employee, and as required by New York State Public Officers’ Law, he was required to complete annual ethics training via a webinar sponsored by the NYS Joint Commission on Public Ethics. It should be noted that every NYS employee whose
annual salary was at or above $97,448 was required to complete a financial disclosure statement ("FDS"), and required to complete the webinar (this was done to promote transparency and could help identify conflicts of interest). He shared that the webinar was very passive and might not elicit strong attention and adherence to the subject. In addition, there were no post-assessment surveys, or any tool issued to gauge learning of other state employees. Dougherty and Manning shared that they provided forums and retreats with their divisional leadership team, systematically reviewing and discussing how they affected/effected ethics, and used the domino-affect to effect change forward; they noted that they pushed and provoked thought on value-proposition related to ethics per person (and spend a lot of time reviewing and discussing the “gray” in some ethical scenarios involving students). Manning shared that his team spent significant time, during their retreats, reviewing and analyzing these matters within the context and connection to the institution’s faith-based values and mission orientation.

However, several participants indicated that these professional development outlets only provided minimal exposure and training on ethics and ethical development. Christakis, who presently served as the regional director for the NASPA Region II Advisory Board, indicated that he was unsure if ethics was a core component in NASPA’s current strategic plan. Both Mitra and O’Grady noted the challenges of identifying the right professional development opportunity, both for themselves and their team, sharing that their respective institutions would be concerned about the return on investment in terms of professional development and growth (and how this was gauged and assessed). Mitra shared that the SSAO needed to examine what was already in existence in terms of professional development opportunities and consider the blind spots around the organization related to areas for growth. He continued by noting that he
utilized his professional network through NASPA to help review the blind spots within his division and identifying best practices that his team should model.

Addressing Unethical Conduct

All the research participants indicated that when any member of the college or university community and administration, especially the senior student affairs officer, encountered unethical behavior, it must not be ignored, and it must be confronted. Dougherty explained that one cannot shy away from identifying unethical conduct and must maintain a high bar of ethical standards. Dougherty shared that the grind of daily administrative duties could be a barrier and obstruct appropriately addressing unethical behavior. He also shared that the current American political climate might also serve as an impediment to addressing (and discouraging) unethical behavior. He went on to explain that name-calling and bullying were commonly seen as appropriate in American society today, while college and university campuses should focus on building responsible citizens and promoting campus civility.

Christakis referred to the film “Spotlight” with his leadership team as a tool to demonstrate and bring unethical behavior to the forefront. He explained that senior student affairs officers, and other campus leaders, needed to own their roles as decision makers when unethical conduct occurred and address it immediately. In addition, he indicated that engaging in dialogue on how to confront and acknowledge unethical behavior was an important lever but was not done enough. As a senior student affairs officer, Christakis noted that engaging in this type of process should be used as a professional development opportunity. He discussed the situation involving a former chief student affairs officer (“CSAO”) from a SUNY school who engaged in (and admitted to) stealing university funds and using it for personal expenses. He was most concerned that no one inside the institution confronted the CSAO, and the institution enabled and
condoned it. This type of behavior, and the lack of response and resolution from the institution, indicates a need for further ethical training and development (not just from entry-level staff and middle management, but including those senior college and university officials and members of the board of trustees.

*Staff Development and Evaluation*

When participants were asked how they ensured their professional staff was abiding by the ethical standards of their institution, some noted that certain institutions had a myriad of written policies and left it to personal interpretation. Moreover, some participants noted that publicly sponsored institutions had long-established policies, where private institutions focused more conversations incorporating accountability (which Manning shared could leave room for potential ethical/or unethical engagement). Dougherty, Manning, and St. Leger shared that they have intentionally focused on personal conversations with their team, rather than leaving their staff to read and review policies and procedures on their own (but they both noted that this has occurred more in small colleges and universities).

Though all the participants indicated while it was a necessity to tie ethical and unethical behavior to professional staff performance and evaluation, many acknowledged that they have not encountered many unethical behaviors demonstrated by their employees while on the job. In his past career, Manning recalled someone who worked on his team who had engaged in an unethical behavior and had to encourage the employee to resign from the position (and it only occurred once in his 38 years of service in higher education). St. Leger noted that she has had staff members who engaged in unethical behavior towards each other, which bordered on termination but was addressed and managed with mediation. She continued to note that these violations affected programming and operational efficiency and effectiveness and was not
managed effectively prior to her elevation as the chief student affairs officer. Mitra noted that he has had to terminate two staff members due to their unethical behavior, especially a staff member who engaged in sexually harassing behavior towards students and staff. O’Grady shared that a former employee was terminated because they insisted on engaging in a physical altercation with a student outside the university. While the participants noted that these types of situations were uncommon during their tenure, it is necessary to address these types of situation through the formal staff performance and evaluation process.

Christakis indicated that he uses a public forum to discuss and recognize ethical behavior. He encouraged his staff to identify and celebrate positive bystanders (those who effectively intervene and prevent potentially violent situations) around campus, while strongly encouraging every co-curricular opportunity to promote ethics and ethical decision making for his team and students. In addition, he shared that it was the SSAO’s responsibility to make ethics a key priority, and the challenge was how to make it front and center (and was especially curious to see a scan of institutional mission statements to see how many incorporated ethics or ethical decision within them).

Dougherty indicated that he often revisits the institution’s mission and values with his leadership team, and stresses that he cannot rearticulate these statements often enough. He shared that this information was documented and considered a key part of the accreditation process (noting that his division had just completed a 5-year strategic plan that also incorporated this information). In addition, he shared that he spends time intentionally reflecting on his division’s mission and values and includes visual reminders purposely as a part of his staff agenda. Dougherty continued by adding that practical ethics training needed to be incorporated in the professional development portfolio for everyone in his division, intentionally identifying
opportunities available both on-campus, or via a regional or national conference that provided this type of training for professional staff. He shared that everyone on his team needed to realize that they were seen as role models and ethical leaders on campus and could not assume that they were invisible. He noted that it was important for him to set the tone and be clear on staff expectations and ethical standards, noting that it was difficult to hold people accountable when it was the ethical standards of the institution were unknown. He continued that he engaged in a detailed and in-depth professional staff evaluation process, including a multi-page page reflection with his direct reports, including a 360-degree student-based evaluation and qualitative feedback from other colleagues (O’Grady echoed this similar process at her institution). Lastly, he shared that the professional staff evaluation was bound in the division’s values. Staff were rewarded for their positive evaluations by financial merit awards and a staff appreciation committee process that highlighted community engagement.

Mitra shared that it was important to determine if the institution’s expectations were already documented, if the documents were published in hard copy or published online, and what it would be required to publish these documents (if they were not already published). He indicated that his entry-level staff did not receive enough support for professional development and encouraged his direct reports to identify opportunities for this population to receive and participate in these opportunities. Moreover, he stressed to his direct reports that they translated new knowledge and information they received from their professional conferences with their respective teams. In terms of professional staff performance and evaluation, Mitra indicated that documentation was critical. He engaged in quarterly evaluations with his direct reports, which was informal, but used this as an opportunity to help his team with progressive professional
At the core of her team, O’Grady indicated that every Fall semester, she would review and publish the University’s ethical guidelines. She endorsed the use of case studies and table-top exercises to practice how to engage in situations that may prompt ethical decision-making, which she noted was not easy, but strongly encouraged her team to work through exercises and provided ample time to do so. She shared that table-top exercises worked well to determine how people were processing their thoughts and forward-thinking, and strongly encouraged her team to debrief with other campus partners on what was done well, what was not done well, and to consider if decision making had changed if something else arose, and what was missed. She added that, in terms of staff performance evaluations, she had pretty “frank” discussions with her team during the middle of a school year. She continued by noting that there was a category on the evaluation form entitled, “ethical behavior and diversity” that was clearly outlined, which allowed her to make and keep notations. While she indicated that it did not occur often, there might be an opportunity to promote a staff member given their demonstrated capability. She does extend travel with a professional development allotment, especially to younger staff members, and encouraged her staff to engage in committees associated with NASPA, ACPA, etc.

Pertuz indicated that divisional assessment was key to documenting these policies and protocols. SSAOs' did not often educate their leadership teams and assumed their team was conducting and educating their direct reports on the institution’s expectations for behavior (but also shared that this was a global assumption). When dealing with staff performance and unethical conduct, she noted that it depended on the seriousness of the behavior (and should
result in probation or termination). Given fiscal resources, she indicated that sometimes there was not room for progressive professional development. Moreover, she remarked that staff recognition processes should model what occurred when recognizing student leaders and should include time and resources.

St. Leger posited that the SSAO needed to do an ethics audit, focused on student and faculty expectations, determine how are these populations exposed to institutional expectations, and how were the messages regarding the institution’s ethical expectations were promoted (O’Grady echoed similar sentiments). She indicated that if her staff did not behave ethically, it could be a hinderance to their work on campus, and it only required an act of misconduct (from a member of her team) to thwart the SSAO’s efforts in fostering an ethical climate. She was very intentional with her team regarding the communication of institutional expectations and openly discussed how this would hurt or harm the team or the institution’s reputation. She had an open-door policy with the team, encouraged questions, and used feedback loops to evaluate strategic priorities. St. Leger continued by adding that staff recognition was a critical incentive but depended on the individual (as some of the staff members would simply appreciate a pat on the back). Some of the researchers noted that when their staff engaged in respectable work and demonstrated positive ethical behavior over time, others around campus would identify them as an “expert”. This would enable those employees to grow their professional reputations and sphere of influence (especially when they engage in student affairs professional organizations).

Conclusion

This study highlighted several opportunities and challenges that both positively (and adversely) impacted the senior student affairs officer’s role in fostering an ethical campus climate. The results of this study revolved around three main themes: how the SSAOs’ defined
ethical climate and ethical dilemmas, how the SSAOs’ relationship and reputation impacted their ability to foster an ethical campus climate, and how SSAOs’ managed ethical and professional development. The first theme summarized how the participants not only defined ethical climate but noted how this climate was impacted by an institution’s mission and values, and the external influences that affected how a campus responded to ethical dilemmas. The second theme emphasized the relationships and reputation SSAOs’ managed in their efforts to foster an ethical campus climate, particularly their relationships with both the campus president and faculty, and how they modeled ethical leadership around their campus. The third theme focused on the SSAOs’ lack of ethical development training, how they engaged their staff in professional development around this subject, and how they addressed unethical behavior. In the next chapter, the findings generated from these themes are discussed in further detail.
Chapter 5 – Discussion/Implications

This chapter presents a review of the research questions and methodology used in this study. Key findings of Chapter 4 are summarized, and a discussion of the results is presented. The chapter opens with a discussion of the research participants’ thoughts on their role in fostering an ethical campus climate, sorted out with the following headings: 1) SSAOs’ role in managing ethical dilemmas; 2) SSAOs’ rapport and relationships, 3) the SSAO as the ethical leader, and 4) the lack of SSAO’s ethics preparation and training.

This study sought to answer the following research questions:

- How do senior student affairs administrators (“SSAOs’”) perceive their role in fostering an ethical climate on their campus?
- How do the perceptions of SSAOs’ regarding their role in fostering an ethical climate on college campuses influence their actions and behavior?

To answer these questions, a qualitative inquiry using a narrative case study methodology was employed. The backdrop of the study involved several senior student affairs officers (SSAOs’) who served as members of the National Association for Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) Region II Advisory Board. A total of seven members of the NASPA Region II Advisory Board participated in this study, and 60-minute, one-on-one interviews were conducted. An interview protocol was developed so identical questions would be asked to all participants (see Appendix __). After conducting an inductive analysis of the data, four main themes emerged as well as several underrepresented themes.

SSAOs’ Role in Addressing/Managing Ethical Dilemmas

The role and purpose of higher education has been shifting (Bowen and Fincher, 2018). Along with this shift comes the evolving ethical landscape on college and university campuses. Several of the research participants referred to the increasing federal regulatory mandates.
affecting both student conduct and the ethical campus climate, such as Title IX (Education Amendments of 1972) and the Clery Act of 1990. Many of the research participants discussed the growing challenges and dilemmas affecting the campus ethical climate. In addition, all of the research participants noted how these issues impacted the way the ethical campus climate was managed and maintained by campus leadership.

While issues such as cheating, disorderly conduct, and the misuse of alcohol have adversely affected the ethical campus climate for over 300 years, there were some pressing student behaviors garnering more attention on today’s college and university campuses. These included free speech, mental health (in particular, student confidentiality when managing and addressing a student mental health concern), and sexual violence (Redding, 2018; Roy and Camiré, 2017; Smith, 2018). In addition, there was a growing concern about how student misconduct issues were adversely impacting the SSAO’s ability to effectively foster an ethical campus climate that promoted diversity and inclusive communities (Dungy, 2012).

In addition, the research participants in this study discussed the challenges encountered when managing and addressing the misconduct of other student affairs staff. Gini (2015) specifically noted that ethics is something that is only spoken and practiced through the private lives of employees, but not at the workplace. An employee could sacrifice status, position, profits, and It could cost us prestige, position, profits and achievement within their organization. The ethical misconduct of staff personnel within an organization has seen some attention in the scholarly literature among practitioners and academics (Davis, Ruhe, Lee, and Rajadhyaksha, 2007; Overman, Akkerman, and Torenvlied, 2016; Reybold and Halx, 2018; Tenbrunsel, Rees, and Diekmann, 2018). After completing participant interviews, it is my opinion that an element of student affairs performance evaluation processes that needs additional
consideration is the inclusion of the ethical dimensions of employee performance. The Ethics Committee of the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) specified that additional skills training on student affairs performance evaluations be provided, with an emphasis on ethical-decision making (http://www.myacpa.org/ethicscomm).

**SSAOs’ Rapport and Relationships**

According to Sandeen (2001), “the senior student affairs officer is responsible for earning the trust and support of presidents… which is crucial to the success of the organization” (p. 191). In addition, SSAO’s are strongly encouraged to develop a positive relationship with their campus president (Dungy & Ellis, 2011; Heffernan, 2011). College or university presidents assign the senior student affairs officer with the charge for providing leadership and strategic planning for all administrative areas related to co-curricular student life on their respective campuses (Gigliotti and Ruben, 2017). They work together, collaboratively, to provide guidance and direction for various functional areas that facilitate the development and maintenance of college campus environments and student success. They serve in a senior leadership capacity, reporting directly to the president, and oversee the overall planning and management of programs, services, and initiatives that support the institution’s mission.

Ruthkosky (2013), who explored SSAOs’ trustworthiness with their campus presidents and other campus leaders, discovered that presidents and colleagues trust SSAO’s when they demonstrated the knowledge and proficiency needed for this critical leadership position, authentically engaged, employs a knowledgeable team of professionals who engage in quality programs and services, and when other campus leaders acknowledge and welcome the depth and insights provided by the SSAO. Moreover, presidents trust their SSAO’s when they provide the following: 1) demonstrate and display professional competence in their job, 2) pay attention and
are mindful of the little things (ensuring pebbles do not become problematic boulders for the president or the institution), 3) establish and maintain rapport with critical stakeholders in and around the campus community, 4) display allegiance and devotion to the institution, and 5) anticipate outcomes and manage expectations.

One of the standards noted in the Principles of Good Practice in Student Affairs (Blimling and Whitt, 1999) focuses on the critical importance of building relationships and collaborating with campus partners to promote student learning. McCabe (2005) also supports the need for collaboration between student affairs and faculty colleagues toward a shared goal of an improved campus climate. As Rhatigan (2013) noted, the field of student affairs was created after faculty steered their attention away from students’ life outside the academic corridor. The racial climate on today’s campuses provides an opportunity for SSAOs’ and faculty to collaborate and engage students in dialogue about race, diversity, and social justice. In order for SSAOs’ and faculty to partner on programs and initiatives that effectively foster the campus ethical climate, there is a critical need for trust and rapport between both entities (Commodore, Gasman, Conrad, and Nguyen, 2018).

The SSAO as the Ethical Campus Leader

A strategic priority for student affairs at a college or university is to not only establish but maintain a moral consciousness on campus by sponsoring and encouraging ethical behavior on campus and identifying and challenging unethical behavior (Plante and Plante, 2016; Safatly, Itani, El-Hajj, and Salem, 2017). As several of the research participants indicated, Presidents view the SSAO as the ethical compass for their campus and the role model for ethical leadership on the campus, which is supported by Wingerden, Ellis, and Pratt, Jr. (2015). SSAOs’ should enthusiastically and absolutely assume their responsibility to install and maintain the ethical
campus climate. The SSAO needs to be, and remain, consistent (i.e. – follow through and stand by what they said they are going to do), transparent (i.e. – clear and precise communication and action allow for effective partnerships), present (i.e. – meeting and engaging with students, faculty, and professional staff out and around the campus community) and visible (i.e. – serving as the critical spokesperson when needed). Given that SSAOs’ are significant and influential leaders within a higher education institution, their ability and intention to behave ethically (and promote behavior that is ethical) is beneficial not only to their institution, but to the institution’s other leaders as well.

Best practices have been established for colleges and universities to proactively promote and foster an ethical campus climate, including the critical role the campus leadership (in this case, senior student affairs officers) play in influencing said climate (Goodman and Cole, 2017; Woodson and Zhu, 2018). Campus leadership sets the ethical footprint for their respective institution, and it is their responsibility to foster and maintain an ethical campus climate. It is also the responsibility of the campus leadership to implement ethical programs, policies, and procedures that would advise and form employee’s ethical conduct. Johnson (2017), McMillan (2017), and Trevino and Nelson (2016) proposed best practices to foster an ethical campus climate, or a more ethical environment in the workplace. These authors indicated that leadership could influence an ethical climate through the strengthening of ethical organizational values and the incorporation of policies, procedures, and programs including clear, transparent, and continuous communication, training, guidance and coaching. NASPA, the ACPA Ethics Consortium, and the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) provide professional ethical guidelines that reflect Kitchener’s (1985) and Blimling’s (1998) principles for ethical decision making that is sound and rooted in best practices of the profession.
SSAOs’ Lack of Ethics Preparation and Training

According to Patton, Renn, Guido, and Quaye (2016), while the field of student affairs has grown, there appears to be a lack of training and development of student affairs administrators. Shapiro and Stefkovich (2016) and Reybold, Halx, and Jimenez (2008) indicated that there are no requirements for higher education administrators to possess any formal knowledge in ethics. However, as supported by Johnson (2017) and Martin, Danzig, Wright, Flanary, and Orr, (2016), college and university administrators must be provided the training and skills necessary to make ethical decisions. Active reflection is a good, positive nuance and outcome of ethical decision-making; however, for ethical decision-making to be effective, it should be an authentic and genuine component of a senior leader or manager’s decision matrix or methodology.

Al-Omari (2012) stated “with current societal trends such as economic distress and continual ethical dilemmas, examining potential strategies for supporting positive ethical climates is more essential than ever” (p. 276). Generally speaking, most senior student affairs administrators have had training in developing ethical standards and implementing codes of student conduct through their participation at ASCA and NASPA conferences; what they may lack is the development of ethical awareness, mindfulness, and principles. While this can likely be accomplished through graduate preparation programs, some senior student affairs officers may have educational backgrounds in areas outside student affairs (i.e. – business, or a science-related, or other liberal arts-related area). In addition, ethics education should support all student affairs personnel, including SSAOs’, to engage more fully in the development, maintenance, and fostering of an ethical campus climate.
Theoretical Implications

Theory of Planned Behavior

Data were collected from senior student affairs officers (SSAOs’) to find responses to the major research questions. One of the theoretical frameworks for this study and literature was grounded in Azjen’s theory of planned behavior (1991). This theory states that actions and behaviors are affected by the influence of the attitude of the individual regarding the act, the behavioral intentions, the subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. Individuals must have the intention to complete an activity. This theory implies that the actions of the SSAOs’ are affected by their perceptions of how they foster an ethical campus climate, the perceptions of those around them (specifically the campus president and faculty), as well as how these perceptions influence their actions and behavior.

The theory of planned behavior served as a strong framework in exploring senior student affairs officers’ perceptions of their role in fostering an ethical campus climate. I have inferred, from interviewing the research participants in this study, that social norms and perceived behavioral control were not dominant constructs in forming intentions towards fostering an ethical campus climate. The construct of social norms arose for research participants when discussing their involvement in student affairs professional organizations such as ACPA and NASPA. Engaging with these organizations allows SSAOs’ to network and connect with their colleagues and peers from institutions across the globe. Moreover, this supports an SSAO’s work on campus and allows for the discussion of ideas and challenges impacting their work on today’s campuses. The dominant constructs that emerged in the study were attitude, perceived power, and subjective norms. The participants’ attitudes regarding managing ethical dilemmas,
addressing the unethical behavior of their staff, and serving as the moral conscience appeared to significantly determine their intentions to foster an ethical campus climate.

In Ajzen’s (1991) theory of planned behavior, the “availability of requisite opportunities and resources (e.g., time, money, skills, and cooperation of others)” (p. 182) are factors in whether someone will in fact perform a behavior. While some of the SSAOs’ in this study spoke of challenging relationship with faculty, a collaborative relationship between SSAOs’ and faculty colleagues would pave the way to forge a more effective partnership between student affairs and academic affairs. Inviting and encouraging faculty into non-academic spaces (such as residence halls and the student center) would build more access and respect towards student affairs personnel. However, under the lens of perceived power (Azjen, 1991) a challenge that may impede an SSAO’s ability to effectively foster an ethical climate may be lack of time, personnel and financial resources needed to support programs, services, and initiatives. Unfortunately, higher education institutions are encountering difficulties meeting (or increasing) student enrollment (Murphy, 2015) and fundraising goals (Stein, 2017), taking attention away from efforts to foster an ethical campus climate.

While many of the research participants were significantly engaged with their professional student affairs organizations like NASPA and ACPA, numerous participants indicated that they did not receive considerable ethics development or training through scholarly endeavors. While some were exposed to analysis of case studies involving ethical decision-making through their doctoral programs, many of the participants indicated that they received their practical ethics training through their involvement in student affairs professional organizations (i.e. – conference and workshop participation, and networking with professional colleagues). While Dr. Christakis noted that every New York State employee who makes
$97,448 must complete comprehensive online ethics training, it is only required to complete once a year (and this method has not been assessed as an effective learning method).

Additionally, the findings revealed that the research participants involved in this study were strongly influenced by both internal and external factors about their role in fostering an ethical campus climate (supporting the constructs of subjective norms and behavioral intention of the theory of planned behavior). The SSAOs’ are actively involved and engaged in managing ethical dilemmas, especially those involving students, on their campuses, and campus presidents (who normally appoint these individuals to these capacities) entrust them in these roles. It can also be inferred that the study’s participants noted that the socio-political atmosphere (especially in Washington, D.C.) has had a great impact on their role in fostering an ethical campus climate. While the SSAO manages the perception across campus of only being a student advocate, they are also involved in helping faculty, staff, members of their institution’s board of trustees, and federal/state legislators understand and appreciate the characteristics and challenges of today’s college students. It can be inferred from this research that SSAOs’ embrace their role as the campus expert on managing ethical dilemmas and serving as the moral conscience. As both Pertuz and St. Leger indicated, people tend to think of senior student affairs officers are only responsible for the “fun stuff” on campus (especially faculty). However, while the SSAO and their team may have a hand in coordinating and leading these types of endeavors on-campus, they are also engaging in these activities to address the challenges to both the consumer appeal and aggressively competitive enrollment environment that exemplifies today’s higher education market (Murphy, 2015).

Ethical Climate Theory
At its most essential level, the ethical climate theory influences not only leaders’ perceptions regarding how an organization or institution interprets ethical conduct, but also offers several observations regarding how leaders describe their perception of moral or ethical behavior and subsequent ethical climate (Demirtas, Hannah, Gok, Arslan, and Capar, 2017; Hansen, Dunford, Alge, and Jackson, 2016). The ethical climate is a significant aspect of the organizational climate, and aids in the fostering of an environment focused on integrity and moral development (Gamliel and Peer, 2013). Moreover, Murphy and Lewis (2018) indicated that a richer understanding of the organizational ethical climate offers a frame of reference that permits leaders to assess and gauge any ethical concerns that arise. While there have been limited studies related to the ethical climate within student affairs, there are many scholarly inquiries using the lens of ethical climate in other situations which have demonstrated intriguing results (as noted in Chapter 2).

Creating and maintaining an ethical climate within the workplace is one of most difficult leadership challenges within their respective administrative capacity (Johnson, Becker, Cummins, Estrada, Freeman, and Hall, 2016; Walumbwa, Hartnell, and Misati, 2017). It is critical and essential for leaders of organizations to address the unethical behavior of their personnel (Ferrell, 2016; Johnson, 2017). This study confirmed this notion, given the research participants’ responses to managing both the ethical dilemmas and unethical behavior of students and staff. Donaldson (2016) specified that leaders should not tolerate any unethical behavior demonstrated by their employees, and should address their behavior, accordingly, supporting what the research participants discussed in this study.

Recent scholarly research strongly supports the notion that the promotion and expectation of staff ethical behavior should be covered in the performance evaluation, assessment, and
compensation processes (Mone and London, 2018). Leaders of organizations can regulate the allocation of enticing employee incentives such as professional advancement, salary increases and other financial supplements, added work responsibilities, and professional development opportunities. Nolan (2015) indicated that job benefits and perks could either greatly encourage (or discourage) employees from engaging and maintaining ethical behavior. According to the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (2012), “Senior managers need to work hard to catch new hires doing things right . . . then recognize and reward them for those behaviors” (p. 1). Moreover, if managers or senior leaders reward unethical decision making and/or behavior, then higher frequency of unethical behavior is likely to occur (Bolino, Klotz, Turnley, Podsakoff, MacKenzie, and Podsakoff, 2018; Ordóñez and Welsh, 2015).

Leaders modeling positive ethical behavior and establishing an expectation of what is appropriate conduct (considering ethical deliberations) is not only necessary but is critical in maintaining an ethical work climate. Furthermore, it may benefit an institution’s senior leadership to assess the campus ethical climate since ethical climate has been shown to contribute to the establishment of ethical norms, values and expected standards of behavior, while also strengthening greater employee satisfaction and levels of organizational commitment (Johnson, Becker, Cummins, Estrada, Freeman, and Hall, 2016; Trevino and Nelson, 2016). Supporting their role as a campus ethical leader, Mayer, Kuenzi, and Greenbaum (2010) shared the following:

“Ethical leaders, in particular, are expected to enforce practices, policies, and procedures that serve to uphold ethical conduct. Ethical leaders make decisions with ethics in mind, consider ’what is the right thing to do’ in terms of ethics, regularly communicate with subordinates regarding ethics, and reward and punish employees in accordance with
ethical principles. In this way, ethical leaders make it clear to employees that upholding ethics is an important organizational outcome.” (p. 8).

Faculty and student affairs personnel must partner and collaborate to ensure an ethical campus climate and help students with their moral development. The core of student affairs work on college and university campuses is their partnership with faculty, with a critical focus on personal accountability and responsibility, education for an active and engaged citizenship, and high standards for ethics and value (Braskamp, Trautvetter, and Ward, 2016; Huda, Jasmi, Alas, Qodriah, Dacholfany, and Jamsari, 2018). This research supported what the research participants indicated was needed in terms of their relationship and collaboration with faculty in order to foster an ethical campus climate.

Bowman and Knox (2008) conducted a study demonstrating the value and contributions effective ethics training has in promoting and fostering an ethical work climate. Raile’s (2013) research indicated how essential it is for ethics training to not only be effective (covering all topics critical to all employees), but to be assessed for its effectiveness. An interesting revelation occurred during this study; none of the research participants identified or mentioned their collaboration or connection with their campus’ chief ethics and compliance officer. As Raile noted, it is critical for educational leaders to be informed and aware of ethics officials in their institution and advised to pursue these officials for counsel. The scholarly literature strongly supports the necessity of ethics training for school leaders, noting that it is vital to provide them with the skills and tools needed to effectively manage and address ethical dilemmas (Setó-Pamies and Papaoikonomou, 2016; Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2018). However, there is a serious shortfall in this type of training for educational leaders due to timing, lack of fiscal and personnel resources, and its absence from syllabi in both graduate and professional degrees. It is critical
and essential for financial resources to be made available to support ethics training for educational leaders, so they are best prepared to manage and resolve ethical dilemmas. Training for educational leaders can be provided from internal resources, such as faculty or staff (who are subject matter experts), or reputable external consultants with no affiliation with the institution.

The findings of this research added new information to the extant literature because none of the existing studies examined college or university leaders, and specifically senior student affairs officers and their perceptions of the ethical campus climate (or, in this case, how they perceived their role in fostering an ethical campus climate). This study now provides an opportunity to further stimulate and inspire thought and dialogue about the ethical campus climate and how it may affect, encourage, or impact the perception of campus leaders and their ethical analysis or decision-making abilities. The findings of this study offer an in-depth understanding of the perceptions from senior student affairs officers regarding their role in fostering an ethical campus climate; moving forward, this type of analysis can provide detailed insight for higher education leaders to better comprehend unethical behavior and make the investments necessary to improve the ethical campus climate. To proactively foster an ethical campus climate and prevent future ethical transgressions, the ability to understand ethical (and unethical) behavior is an important practice for college and universities. Al-Omari (2012) stated that "with current societal trends such as economic distress and ongoing ethical dilemmas, it is more essential than ever to examine potential strategies to promote positive ethical climates" (p. 276).

Limitations of the Study

This study was limited by the size of the pool available to be part of the sample since the participants had to identify with the following criteria in mind: 1) be a senior student affairs
officer (identified as either the chief student affairs officer that reports to either the President or Provost, or the person that serves as the chief student affairs officer’s second in-command within their division/unit), and 2) must be members of the NASPA Region II Advisory Board. Fifteen (15) advisory board members qualified as individuals who I was seeking to participate in this study and contacted them about their interest in participating. Seven (7) members responded that they were interested in participating in this study. While the research participants’ responses were typical in essential ways of their colleagues nationally, it is difficult to know this for sure. While the select cohort of participants for this research study was small, the relevance and significance of the research study findings may be applicable not only for the higher education institutions they represent (both in their administrative capacities, and their role as members of the NASPA regional board), but also for higher education institutions nationally seeking to foster an ethical campus climate. In addition, the sample of this study was not necessarily representative of the gender, racial, and cultural diversity that exists among senior student affairs officers across the country.

The study was also limited using a purposive sample, which was achieved by targeting individuals who specifically served as the NASPA Region II Advisory Board. Gathering the purposive sample limited participation by anyone outside the NASPA Region II Advisory Board. Use of a non-probability purposive sample limits the generalizability of the study results. As such, the results of this study can only be generalized to the specific sample achieved; the results may not be generalized to the general population. The interview process also limited this study. There are inherent limitations on data collected through interviews due to the realities of human interaction (Patton, 2002). The relationship and engagement between the research participants and myself (as the interviewer), as well as personal bias and emotional state during the interview,
can affect the data. These are just some of the factors that can influence the research participant's ability to provide accurate and comprehensive answers to questions about the interview. These factors directly affected the quality of the data collected. The research was therefore limited by the accuracy and completeness of the participants' responses. Exploring the perceptions of SSAOs’ from other regions of the country could expand the knowledge base of this research. In addition, exploring the perceptions of other institutional leaders may have added value to understanding the effective and efficient management of ethical behavior in higher education.

*Implications for Practice*

Based on the findings of this study and the literature reviewed, the recommendations for practice are proposed:

1. The need for SSAOs’ to participate and engage in continuing education and professional development opportunities, especially occasions provided outside the formal classroom setting. If SSAOs’ are seeking to foster an ethical campus climate, they have to remain current on the evolving ethical dilemmas and issues affecting college/university students (i.e. social justice, diversity and inclusion, technology, free speech, etc.). SSAOs’ should participate in professional conferences, open forums, symposia, and other opportunities to engage in conversations with other colleagues and learn best practices from other higher education institutions. In addition, SSAOs’ should serve in leadership capacities in various higher education professional organizations. This will provide an SSAO the opportunity to dialogue with other higher education leaders regarding the ethical campus climate, and ensure there are a variety of occasions to facilitate workshops and discussions on topics related to fostering an ethical campus climate.
2. Design, conduct, and implement a bi-annual ethics audit (Ferrell, 2016; Ma’Ayan and Carmeli, 2016) for the student affairs division and students across campus; this would be a great opportunity to collaborate with the chief compliance and ethics officer. This individual is responsible for many programs and activities in their organizations, including codes of conduct for students, faculty, and staff; ethics hotlines and compliance-related reporting and training. In addition, they are charged with monitoring organizational compliance with institutional policies, protocols, and procedures. Both the chief compliance and ethics officer and the SSAO can work together to engage in this review for the student affairs division. The SSAO can invite the chief compliance and ethics officer into several spaces involving students, such as new student orientation and student leadership trainings, to facilitate programs and discussions in a collaborative manner. Lastly, both campus leaders can jointly assess, determine the effectiveness of the audit, and modify it accordingly.

3. Engage in an intentional annual review regarding the expected standards of behavior on college and university campuses, including the codes of conduct for students, faculty, and professional staff. This review should be informed, and reviewed through the lens, by the ethical issues both students and student affairs staff are encountering on today’s campuses (i.e. – technology, free speech, diversity and inclusion, social justice, etc.). This review should also include employees who are contract-based, such as food service and facilities workers who engage in other non-teaching support services on-campus. Also, if not previously considered, incorporate standards of ethical conduct for members of the board of trustees, corporate and/or advisory boards, and the alumni association.

4. Identify and continue to engage in table-top exercises that provide opportunities to reflect on ethical dilemmas, decisions, relationships, and professional staff evaluations, including
networking with SSAOs’ from other institutions across the country. A tabletop exercise is an activity involving key leadership personnel, who are tasked with various roles and responsibilities, and gather to discuss various simulated scenarios involving ethical dilemmas affecting students, staff, and/or faculty. As Rhode (2006) indicates “any effective strategies for promoting moral leadership will require more leadership from the academic community” (p. 51);

5. The need to incorporate ethics training and ethical analysis into student affairs/higher education graduate preparatory programs and student affairs professional associations. Many student affairs graduate courses incorporate tropical conversations involving both ethical issues affecting student life on college campus. Incorporating additional ethics courses, simulated exercises focused on ethical dilemmas (and resolution), and detailed case study analyses can heighten both graduate students and new professionals’ knowledge of sensitivities to professional ethics in practice.

6. Campus-wide training platforms for all campus constituents, which would equip all community members with the available resources and support systems to assist in fostering an ethical campus climate. A committee, appointed by the institution’s president, should be charged with creating the training curriculum. The committee should be comprised of the following: 1) two designees from the Division of Student Affairs, 2) two faculty members, 3) two designees from the Division of Business & Finance, 4) the chief compliance and ethics officer, 5) a senior member of campus police/public safety staff, 6) 2-3 students (appointed by the institution’s student government) and 6) a member from the Office of General Counsel. The committee should be responsible for designing the training programs to educate employees and students on their institutions’ policies, procedures, applicable laws
and regulations, as well as behavioral expectations. The committee should also identify internal (or external) facilitators responsible for leading these training platforms and should identify a variety of assessment tools to measure the effectiveness of these training workshops.

Suggestions for Future Research

This study was born out of a desire to explore the perceptions of senior student affairs administrators on college and university campuses and their role in fostering an ethical campus climate. Several recommendations for suggested research are offered that may contribute to the field of research related to senior student affairs officers, ethical climate in student affairs, and organizational ethics in higher education in general. The study was one of several that focused on senior student affairs officers in higher education; most studies located in the extant literature, which were still limited, focused on faculty and student perspectives on the campus ethical climate (Ancis, Sedlacek, and Mohr, 2000; Brown, 1985; Luthar, DiBattista, Gautschi, 1997; McCabe and Pavela, 2004). As such, future research should be conducted with the aim of replicating the study with other senior student affairs officers in other regions of the country; replication could lend further credibility to the results of this study. Longitudinal research, including following senior student affairs officers over a period of several years, which may allow researchers to see how, if at all, their narratives, relationships, and/or perspectives change over time. Specifically, the use of longitudinal data on how SSAOs’ engage in various strategies, relationships, and training on managing and addressing ethical dilemmas may assist those who teach in, shape, and manage graduate programs to identify and implement new and pioneering ways in which to challenge and support students and future senior institutional leaders.
Many researchers use the theory of planned behavior to predict an individual’s willingness to carry out a behavior (Ajzen, 2011; Cheng & Chu, 2014). Ajzen (2011) asserts if the participant has positive attitudes, normative beliefs, and perceived behavioral controls, the action is more likely to be carried out (Ajzen, 2011). The chances of success for the SSAO to foster an ethical campus climate could be higher if they have a positive attitude toward fostering an ethical climate around their respective campus. Therefore, future research should also include a quantitative examination of the SSAOs’ attitudes toward fostering an ethical campus climate, considering faculty, student, and campus leadership perspectives. Comparing the SSAOs’ attitudes with achieving an ethical campus climate may provide deeper insight to the effective strategies and collaborations being used by SSAOs’.

Future qualitative inquiries, in conjunction with quantitative research, of senior student affairs officers’ perceived role in fostering an ethical campus climate could help gain a more in-depth understanding of the participants’ responses to help better determine what influenced their perceived behavioral intentions. Quantitative research could provide an explanatory snapshot regarding the type of ethical and professional development/training received, and how senior student affairs officers address and resolve unethical behavior. Future research on ethical climate should consider being expanded to include different types of college and universities, including public, private, for-profit, faith-based, and two-year institutions. Moreover, additional research is needed regarding how ethical climate is fostered in higher education, including expanding or revising the research subjects and altering the research methodology.

While this research could continue in student affairs, it is critical for this research to be extended to include the leadership of higher education institutions, in general, and how the leadership of these institutions perceived that they fostered an ethical campus climate. I think
that it is important for institutional leaders to reflect on their approaches to promoting and supporting thought, dialogue, programs, and initiatives pertaining to the ethical campus climate. Campus leadership that fails to consider the importance of ethics, character, and values across their organization (both within and outside the classroom) may be seen as condoning and enabling a campus climate that is unethical. It is also important to note that, while this study did not consider the unethical behavior (or unethical behavioral intentions) of senior student affairs officers, this may open an additional avenue for further exploration. Moreover, as Swazey, Louis, and Anderson (as stated in Wingerden, Ellis, and Pratt, 2014) noted, there were concerns demonstrated by students regarding retaliation (for reporting faculty misconduct, as an example). A noted inquiry should be made to examine how senior student affairs officers support concerned students in terms of retaliation (potential, or actual, against the student) and how they confront this behavior appropriately and effectively.

Moreover, future research of other colleges and universities should be expanded to include the perceptions of the campus ethical climate by part-time/adjunct faculty. The research participants involved in the ethical climate study conducted by Al Omari (2012) only included full-time faculty. Rothman’s (2017) research extended Al Omari’s study by focusing on both administrators and faculty’s perceptions of ethical climate at a private college, comparing their perceptions to identify any noteworthy variances. Additional scholarly inquiry should be expanded to include part-time/adjunct faculty, full-time faculty, higher education administrators, and other campus leaders to quantify and determine the apparent ethical climate and then compare these groups to identify any notable changes.
Conclusion

As an establishment committed to shaping the future leaders of tomorrow, higher education continues to encounter ethical lapses that affect its reputation and commitment to student success. However, Reybold, Halx, and Jimenez (2008) indicate that colleges and universities “have a responsibility to promote ethicality” (p. 123). Consequently, the frequent and continuous inquiry into the fostering of an ethical campus climate is critical to better recognize the issues that arise. Moreover, engaging in an ongoing assessment of how the campus ethical climate is being fostered can determine how this may (or may not) be affecting the role (or efforts) of campus leaders in managing and responding to ethical dilemmas, and what strategies or practices higher education institutions can engage in to better instill and foster an ethical campus climate.

As Rothman (2017) noted, “a positive ethical climate starts with leadership” (p. 60). Reynolds, Halix, and Jimenez (2008) indicated that there are a profusion of ethical issues, dilemmas, and problems in student affairs areas on college and university campuses. Senior student affairs officers (SSAOs’), as the moral compass of their institutions, should be both empowered and enabled to critically evaluate, manage, and address the ethical dilemmas that arise on their campus (that involve both their students and their respective staffs). As a campus leader, they should frequently communicate and emphasize the significance of ethical standards and take appropriate action when misconduct occurs to prevent its reoccurrence. With this invaluable knowledge, it is my hope that senior student affairs officers embrace the challenges of fostering a campus ethical climate and are able to effectively employ the practices and strategies identified through this study.
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